

SPECIAL MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN
AND VIA TEAMS

ON MONDAY, 28 SEPTEMBER 2026 AT 10:00AM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER 2026 AT
10:00 AM, AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good morning, Elected Members, staff, members of the public. Our meeting starts. I am going to pass over to Rachel for the roll call.

MS GILLESPIE: Good morning. Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like to welcome everyone to today's meeting. Members of the public, you're very welcome to the chamber. Can I please can you to maintain silence throughout the meeting? I would also like to remind everyone that there's no filming or cameras of any kind permitted in the chamber. Please can I ask everyone to have their mobile phones on silent. For those of you online, please have your cameras off and remain on mute. Elected Members, please keep your cameras on. If you have any technical difficulties please contact either myself or Teresa. Finally, can I remind everyone to ensure respect and dignity are afforded in all discussions in this chamber. Thank you.

I will now take the roll call. Councillor Danny Alvey? No sign there for the moment. Councillor Mark Barry? No. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Erika Doyle? Not present. Councillor Malachai Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Orla Finn? Not present. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Tom Fortune? Not present. Councillor Patsy

- 1 Glennon?
- 2 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.
- 3 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
- 4 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.
- 5 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Shane Langrell?
- 6 COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Present.
- 7 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?
- 8 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present.
- 9 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Pat Mahon?
- 10 COUNCILLOR MAHON: Present.
- 11 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
- 12 COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Present.
- 13 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
- 14 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Present.
- 15 MS GILLESPIE: Present online. Thank you. Councillor Ian Neary?
- 16 COUNCILLOR NEARY: Present.
- 17 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
- 18 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Present.
- 19 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Gerry O'Neill?
- 20 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Anseo.
- 21 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?
- 22 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Anseo.
- 23 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Graham Richmond?
- 24 COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Present.
- 25 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Lourda Scott? Not present. Councillor John
- 26 Snell?
- 27 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.
- 28 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
- 29 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Present.
- 30 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes? Not present. Councillor
- 31 John Ward?
- 32 COUNCILLOR WARD: Present.
- 33 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Ned Whelan?
- 34 COUNCILLOR WHELAN: Present.

1 MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.

3 MS GILLESPIE: Thank you. Councillor Lourda Scott online. Thank you.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: And before we go into the body of the meeting we will just
5 take any votes of sympathy. Councillor Langrell.

6 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I want to send my
7 sympathies to the family of Des Kennedy from Roundwood. Des was laid to rest last
8 week so my condolences to his wife, Liz, his children, John, Dessiree and Dareina.
9 Thank you.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: And from the staff.

11 MS GILLESPIE: We would also like to extend our sympathies to the family of
12 Stephen Kavanagh, brother of our colleague John Kavanagh. Thank you.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: So I am going to pass to Rachel as we have a suspension
14 of -- Sorry.

15

16 (Moment of silence.)

17

18 MS GILLESPIE: May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed, through
19 the mercy of God, rest in peace.

20

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. So we have a request for a suspension of
22 standing orders. I will pass over to Rachel.

23 MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. "Request for a suspension of standing
24 orders, proposed by Councillor Warren O'Toole and seconded Councillor John Ward
25 to formally request additional speaking time beyond the standard three minutes.

26 Given that this is a special meeting with a single item on the agenda and in light of
27 the significance of the matter being considered we believe it is appropriate to allow
28 members sufficient time to fully express their views, the concerns of their
29 constituents and to highlight the direct impact these changes are having on the
30 communities that we represent. A three-minute speaking slot will not be sufficient.
31 Allowing additional time would ensure that all members have a meaningful
32 opportunity to speak on behalf of their constituents and that the seriousness of the
33 issues being raised can be properly considered by the Council. We would therefore
34 request that standing orders are suspended for Monday's meeting." Thank you.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Is there any dissent?

2 COUNCILLOR SNELL: No.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: No? No dissent?

4 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Brien.

6 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Sorry, Cathaoirleach. This is a very important meeting.
7 It's a very sensitive meeting, and I think a debate will be healthy and I agree with
8 that, but what I want to do is ensure that everyone has their fair share of speaking
9 time. And what's happened in the past here is that we've got it back under control
10 over the last two years, is that no one leaves this chamber feeling they haven't been
11 heard. I think that's important. What I would be saying is we stick to our rules
12 which has worked for the last couple of years, the three minutes, but on saying that,
13 if you do need to come back in I would ask the Cathaoirleach to let you in but at least
14 let everyone have a chance to speak first in the interests of fairness. I am not trying
15 to exclude anyone or cut off dialogue. This meeting can go on for as long as need be
16 but I do believe that the three-minute rule worked in the past and it works well. It
17 gives everyone the opportunity to speak. If someone wants to come back in I hope,
18 Cathaoirleach, you'd let them back in. But let's keep it polite, civil, professional and
19 let everyone have their fair share speaking time, but again I would re-emphasise that
20 once everyone has had their fair share please let people come back in because I don't
21 want anyone leaving here today feeling that they haven't been heard, and their voices
22 haven't been heard and indeed their constituents haven't been heard. Because that's
23 what we are here to represent today. Not ourselves, we're here to represent our
24 constituents. I believe everyone should have a fair share of talking time and no one
25 more than another. That's my proposal. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gail Dunne.

27 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. We support Sinn Féin's
28 motion. We feel that it is a one-item agenda and there's nothing else going to be
29 discussed here today so why can't people have their say on a very important matter
30 within our areas. So we will be supporting the motion.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Dunne. Councillor O'Toole.

32 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I appreciate what Councillor
33 O'Brien is saying but I do feel that it is necessary that if people should need the
34 additional time to discuss this that they have that. I think coming back in after a

1 period of time, if there's ten councillors that have spoken before you it loses what
2 you are trying to emphasise, so I would request that we continue with the motion.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Neill.

4 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Cathaoirleach, yeah, I don't agree at all with Councillor
5 O'Brien. I think he has his three minutes up there anyway, but I think there should
6 be leeway here. This thing of a clock up on the wall here with the time, that's wrong.
7 It's not part of standing orders. It's something you brought in here yourself,
8 Cathaoirleach. And I think it is wrong that people are put under pressure for three
9 minutes and then the microphone to be cut off at the end of the three minutes. It's a
10 long way to travel from the far side of Wicklow over here for a miserable three
11 minutes when I'm trying to get my point across. Go raibh mile maith agat.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor O'Neill. Councillor Cronin.

13 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Sorry, just on a completely separate matter, there's
14 people trying to log in online and they haven't been let in, so if we could just let the
15 additional people in online that'd be great. Thank you.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Bourke.

17 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, yeah, if we're supporting this Sinn Féin
18 motion is there an upper limit on time allowed per speaker? Could a speaker
19 technically go on for 20 minutes or half an hour? We have to set some upper limit.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: So technically, yes. I am not going to make a decision myself
21 on how this meeting is conducted today. I will be totally led by the vote of the
22 Elected Members. But yes, technically there can be no upper limit and someone
23 could speak for 20 minutes if they desired. Councillor Kennedy.

24 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I think we should
25 deal with the motion in front of us here today that Sinn Féin put down for us. I think
26 we should call the vote and move on.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Toole.

28 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Unless there could be a slight amendment made to that
29 motion and cap it at five minutes?

30 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: I agree with that.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I have a seconder for that?

32 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: I'll second it.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor O'Brien. Agreed? (Agreed.) Okay. So I
34 just need to take a two-minute adjournment just so we can set the system so there's

1 the five minutes on the system. If you give me two minutes to sort that out. Thank
2 you.

3

4 (Short adjournment.)

5

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, we're now ready to return to meeting. The time is set
7 to five minutes and I will still be bringing people back in at a later point if they have
8 more that they wish to contribute to the meeting. To start off I am going to call on
9 Caroline Fox who is going to provide a presentation to us all in regards the rents.
10 Thank you.

11 MS FOX: Good morning. Thank you, Cathaoirleach and members, for affording me
12 this opportunity to speak on the rent review and the process involved in completing
13 such a rent review. Thanks, Teresa, for sharing the slides there.

14

15 So again, it's a good opportunity to bring you through the process that was involved.
16 It was quite a significant task for all staff involved in completing this throughout the
17 last 18 months or so, but today in a brief presentation I will bring the members
18 through what has happened to this stage.

19

20 The Differential Rent Scheme. The scheme itself, what is the basis of social housing
21 rent is calculated on. All Local Authorities' rents are based on a system called
22 differential rents. This means that the rent is based on your ability to pay. If your
23 income is low your rent will be low. And that is across all Local Authorities. Local
24 Authorities under section 58 of the Housing Act 1966 are allowed to make or amend
25 such rent schemes. This is a matter for the Executive of a Local Authority. This is
26 not a reserve function. Therefore, it is an Executive function of this Local Authority
27 to make a scheme.

28

29 Wicklow County Council was unusual in that we had two differential rent schemes
30 within the county. All other Local Authorities would have one scheme throughout
31 the county. How and ever we operated two schemes; one in Bray Municipal District
32 and one in the remainder of the county.

33

34 Next slide there, Teresa. Thank you.

1
2 Just to explain the difference of those two schemes. The Bray Municipal District
3 Differential Scheme was based and the rent was calculated on the principal earner in
4 the household. This means that it could be an adult child in the house that the rent
5 was calculated on, and that is how the Bray rent scheme was based on. There was no
6 rent cap in Bray. The minimum rent in Bray was €24. Then we move on to the
7 Wicklow scheme. The Wicklow scheme, again a while ago, February 2014, the
8 tenant themselves was assessed. The rent cap was at €200 per week. That means
9 that rent could not be calculated over the €200. The minimum rent in Wicklow was
10 €27. So you can see the disparities between the two schemes within the one county.
11 You could have somebody in Bray on the very same rent in Wicklow Town and the
12 rent would be calculated differently and there would be a different amount.

13
14 Next slide, Teresa, please.

15
16 Therefore, the changes to the schemes, which was an important piece before we
17 entered into a rent review: We amalgamated one scheme in the county. This, as you
18 know, is available on our website and has been since September of '25. Our
19 minimum rent has moved from the €24 and the €27 to a minimum rent now of €30
20 per week. There is no maximum rent being charged so therefore your income will be
21 reflected in your rent. We made a change there which is at a national level and we
22 have been directed I suppose before even we had made this change and noticed it
23 ourselves that child maintenance paid to a parent was no longer assessed. And this
24 was an important change we made in our scheme. Provisions made for persons on
25 Carer's Allowance and Carer's Benefit. Again this is something we had looked at
26 and we felt it was important to make this change. And again, this is at a national
27 level and the means policy has now changed again. The means policy is the policy
28 by the Department of Housing. So the direction came in February of '26 then to
29 make this change as well but we have been ahead of that and made the change, and
30 this is something that family carers of Ireland have been looking for for quite a
31 number of years.

32
33 Next slide there, Teresa, please.

34

1 So the assessment of a Differential Rent Scheme. In order to amalgamate the two
2 schemes, as we have done, so we looked at this from April of '24. We looked at
3 many different schemes throughout the country, our own neighbouring counties, and
4 how it would actually impact on our tenants. The view at the time was that our
5 scheme was robust, that the scheme would cater for the tenants of Wicklow. A
6 number of schemes, as I say, were reviewed. We assessed them against the income
7 samples from some of the tenants and see what impact it would have. At that time
8 we agreed that the scheme that we had here in Wicklow was, as I say, robust to carry
9 forward and go into a rent review.

10
11 During the process we also involved our members and our Strategic Policy
12 Committee. We circulated this draft proposed scheme to the members of this
13 committee in February of '25. The new draft scheme was also issued to the Council
14 members here at a full Council meeting in April '25, and it was discussed in detail.
15 Also during this time, in August of '25 we engaged fully with the members of the
16 Council and held two workshops just to explain the scheme, the impact it may have
17 on tenants and the process, the timeline going forward over the next year.

18
19 The rent review is based on keeping the income and household details up to date. As
20 per tenancy agreement, each tenant is responsible for doing so and this is a part and
21 section A of any rent tenancy that is signed.

22
23 Thanks, Teresa. Next slide.

24
25 So why a rent review and why amalgamate two rent schemes into one? It is fairer
26 for all. Equality for all tenants throughout the county. One rent scheme is fairer. As
27 I mentioned, we had different tenants on same incomes in this county paying
28 different rents. We've had no rent review since 2019. As you know, that's seven
29 years. In general, tenants have not advised us of their change in circumstances in the
30 household and of their income that is coming into the house. Even though it is set
31 clearly out in their tenancy agreement this has not been done.

32
33 The two rent schemes in one county has been highlighted as bad practice by the
34 Local Government Audit Services, and this for a Local Authority could continue.

1 This, as I mentioned, is an opportunity for housing staff to engage with tenants and
2 to seek the updated information within the household, details of who is actually in
3 the house, details as I mention of income as well.

4
5 Thanks, Teresa. Next slide.

6
7 So as I mentioned, the rent review commenced in August of last year. A number of
8 letters were issued to the tenants. So the tenants would have received a rent form to
9 complete. They also would have received the draft Differential Rent Scheme which
10 was issued to them. We sought the information by these forms to be submitted to us
11 by the 12th of September of last year. It is, as I mentioned, the tenants' responsibility
12 to ensure that correct details are submitted for the purpose of calculating the new
13 rent. We had a significant number of documents received. However there was
14 a significant verification required and we had a lot of going back and forward with
15 tenants to ensure that we had the correct information on our files.

16
17 It is a failure not to produce these and we would have implemented a penalty rent on
18 anyone who had not returned the forms. We fully engaged with the tenants and gave
19 them every opportunity to make sure that the forms were returned. We went on
20 social media. We called out on social media platforms and asked the tenants please
21 return the forms. At this stage, in September of '26, we've 606 forms not returned.
22 We will still be assessing these and reviewing those and see can we engage with
23 tenants to produce the information as requested.

24
25 Just to outline the huge volume of paperwork that is involved in carrying out this
26 scheme. All tenants were asked to provide pay slips and to provide information
27 basically on their net income. And I should mention that the calculation of rents is
28 based on net income. If you're self-employed a Notice of Tax Assessment was
29 produced. If it was Social Welfare income this was in the house, a Statement of
30 Income from the Department of Social Protection. Just to note that evidence of any
31 other income was also to be provided, and here we have made an allowance. Again
32 a reference to the Children's Allowance not provided as an assessable income and
33 then Carer's Allowance and then also child maintenance is not assessable for rent
34 calculations.

1
2 Teresa, next slide there, please.

3
4 During this examination of significant documents that was received we noticed that
5 there were some apparent discrepancies in some of the tenancies. So during the rent
6 review process not only did we look at the income but we looked at the households.
7 We looked at the difference between what we had on our iHouse system, a record
8 where we kept the information on the tenants, we found errors. So since September
9 of '25 to September '26 we've looked at Permissions to Reside. We've had 107
10 applications. We have granted 56 of those Permissions to Reside, we have refused
11 16, and there's 11 returned incomplete. The Permission to Reside is where a tenant
12 has somebody in their household that hasn't been declared previously and we have to
13 look for certain documentation to prove this person's income and were they were
14 previously. So it is a good piece of work to undertake. We also had to regularise a
15 number of tenancies. There were 90 regularised tenancies made, 94 outstanding still
16 at the moment. Again, this piece of work has taken some time but we have captured
17 some errors that are within tenancies.

18
19 Just to note that section A of the Tenancy Agreement clearly outlines that each
20 tenant are responsible to advise us if anyone in the household has changed, is there a
21 change in any way to that household. It is an important piece that a tenant is aware
22 of. It is not only about income but it is also based on who is in the household. So
23 this part was part of our rent review as well.

24
25 Thanks, Teresa.

26
27 Again I'll just briefly go through a brief summary of the timelines involved. As I
28 mentioned, letters with the Rent Income Form was issued commencing the 25th of
29 August of last year. Within this we also issued the Differential Rent Scheme out to
30 the tenants. The forms were returned, as I mentioned, by the 12th of September '25.
31 Advertising of the rental review scheme was advertised across all social media
32 platforms. We tried to engage as much as possible with all tenants to ensure that the
33 information was sent in to us. Elected Members here were informed of the progress.
34 The submitted forms were assessed over a number of months. I just would like to

1 note that while it is Social Housing tenants we also have our Housing System Paying
2 tenants as well and Rental Accommodation Scheme tenants. So in fact the
3 assessment was over seven and a half thousand tenants were assessed.

4
5 Rent letters issued to tenants advising them of the new rent was issued on the 15th of
6 September of this year. The new rent scheme will be effective from the 3rd of
7 October.

8
9 I would like to mention that no backdating has occurred during that process. This
10 was a decision made by senior management not to do so.

11
12 Thanks, Teresa.

13
14 So this is some statistics on the rent counts that have been calculated. We have here
15 a sum of 4,519 rent accounts that we have assessed and recalculated. We've not
16 included the penalty rents. There are 606 accounts here that we will be looking at
17 closely. So these statistics are based on the 4,519 rent accounts. 13% of these
18 accounts have seen a rent decrease. 57 have seen an increase or decrease -- 57%
19 have seen an increase or decrease of less than or equal to €24 per week. 77% of all
20 our rent accounts have either seen a rent decrease or an increase of less than €49 per
21 week. Just on those stats then. As I mentioned, decrease, there's 575 rent accounts
22 that have seen a decrease. These range from a decrease of €1 to €370. The rent
23 accounts of 2,572 rent accounts have seen an increase or a decrease of less than €24
24 per week. As I mentioned, there's 606 rent accounts with a penalty rent charge to
25 this account. So as I say we will be reviewing those over the next few weeks.

26
27 The next slide there, Teresa, please.

28
29 As mentioned, this is based on income. This Differential Rent Scheme is based on
30 income. It's based on net income that's in the household of the tenant. With no max
31 set in the Differential Rent Scheme some of the highest rents being charged range
32 from €430 to a sum of €527.50 per week rent being charged. And just to note that
33 this means that the tenant would be receiving a net income in between €98,267 and
34 the top range there would be €128,570. Again I'd like to mention that is net income.

1 I would estimate that the high range there would be receiving a gross income of
2 €200,000.

3
4 To the right-hand side I have set out the Social Housing Support Thresholds. There
5 is where the social housing applicant is assessed when they're coming onto our
6 Social Housing List. The income at this stage in 2023 was set at €40,000, the low
7 range for a single, and the high range of €48,000. So you can see that a person
8 coming into Social Housing may have started on a low income but they have the
9 opportunity to progress, and you can see the figures that tenants have such
10 progressed and the income in coming into some of the households in Wicklow is
11 quite high.

12
13 Teresa, thank you.

14
15 And just to give you examples of some of the rents, and these are just random
16 examples of some of the rents we have calculated over the last few months. These
17 are the weekly rents set out. Two adults working, no working family payment,
18 earning approximately -- and this is only approximate samples just to outline,
19 earning €1,200 net income with dependants of two children. The old rent was
20 €168.50. The new rent that we now calculated is €202.50. A person on Disability
21 Allowance with no dependant, the old rent, this is based on 2019 figures, was
22 €42.50. The new rent is €44.50. One-parent family with two dependant children, the
23 old rent in 2019 was at €46.60 per week and is now at €58 per week. A pensioner,
24 again based on a 2019 calculation, would have been paying a rent of €38.10 a week,
25 it's now set at €48.50 a week. A person working, plus a sub-earner, the estimated net
26 value of that income per week would be in the region of €650. There is a sub-earner
27 there which is an additional €30 added. This was set at €134.90. It's now €154.
28 Two people on Disability Allowance with no dependants, the old rent was €72 per
29 week, it's now €97 per week. One person working with two dependants, again this is
30 an estimation, would be approximately earning €700 net per week. This old rent was
31 €69.20, it has now moved up to €124 a week. This is just to give you some examples
32 of rent accounts and the actual new rents that are now set.

33
34 Teresa, the next slide.

1
2 So to summarise it, again I would like to mention that there has been no rent review
3 in seven years here in Wicklow. We did not backdate the rent accounts for this
4 period. And I have just put to the side the potential impact if we had applied a
5 backdate to rent accounts, this is an example, if there was an average increase of €25
6 per week, a rent account if we had it backdated over the last seven years would be
7 owing €7,800 for those six years. We haven't done that. An increase of €200 per
8 week on a rent account would equate to owing us over six years €64,400 over those
9 six years. Again, this was a decision management not to backdate. Again I'd like to
10 mention, it is the tenant's responsibility to advise the Council of any changes not only
11 to their income but to the household composition. Again we found that this is not
12 happening.

13
14 Over half of the tenants' rent accounts have increased or in fact decreased by €24 or
15 less. It is now one scheme across the county and this is a fair system for all tenants
16 within this county.

17
18 Thank you. I would just like to -- I suppose at this stage you might have gathered it
19 was a mammoth task. This task could not have been completed without significant
20 input from many staff members. I would therefore like to thank sincerely the staff in
21 Housing, the staff particularly our Rents Team who over the last 18 months have
22 worked hard to ensure this Rent Scheme was completed. I also would like to say that
23 not only have they worked they are continuing now to work and respond to the
24 tenants' queries over the next few weeks. Again as I say, it is a significant task to
25 undertake for a county council to do but we have. As I say, over the last few months
26 all staff members, whether it is in the Housing Section or within other members of
27 the staff have worked hard to ensure that this scheme was completed, and it would be
28 remiss of me not to thank staff for all the hard work they have done over recent
29 months. Thank you. Thank you, Cathaoirleach

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Caroline, for your presentation. Before we go to
31 the floor I would like to bring our CEO in, please.

32 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and I just want to I suppose reiterate
33 the words Caroline finished up with by thanking the staff in Housing for what has
34 been a very difficult task and continues to be a very difficult task as there are an

1 awful lot of interactions with members of the public and our tenants to make sure
2 they're on the right rent for their income.

3

4 Just on that point, having heard from the members and the number of representations
5 I have had directly from members of this chamber, as Caroline outlined the effective
6 date of the rent is to be the 3rd of October but I am going to defer that until Saturday,
7 7th November. So the effective date for all new rents will be Saturday, 7th
8 November. That's I suppose to take into account the amount of representations that
9 we have had from tenants, from our members here, and to ensure that anybody that
10 feels that their rent isn't in line with their income or their circumstances have
11 changed has the opportunity to come and have that reassessed with us.

12

13 Along with that, given that not everybody is tech savvy and you know able to engage
14 with us in an email format or by telephone we are going to organise some clinics for
15 tenants in our offices, probably in Bray and in Wicklow Town, to facilitate walk-in
16 queries if people want to come in and bring in their details and have a chat with staff.
17 I hope that might help because I do understand there have been an awful lot of
18 queries and an awful lot of back and forth on this. It is a significant change. It has
19 been a long time since our last rent change, that is understandable, but to allow
20 everybody to work through their own individual circumstances that's where I am at
21 the moment. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Emer. So just a reminder before we go into the
23 meeting, this is a single-agenda meeting to discuss the new Differential Rent
24 Scheme, the rent increases arising from its implementations and the impacts. We are
25 going to allow everyone an opportunity to speak and then the directors will then
26 come in with a response. Obviously then you can come back in if there's
27 clarifications or extra things that you would like to ask. Okay. First of all,
28 Councillor O'Toole.

29 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Caroline. My
30 colleague John Ward and I called this emergency meeting because of the deep
31 concern, fear and financial hardships being caused by the new Differential Rent
32 Scheme due to take effect on the 3rd of October. I want to begin by thanking the
33 other councillors who supported our request and help bring the special meeting
34 before the Council today.

1
2 People across the county are concerned. For some tenants these are not modest
3 increases. We are hearing directly from people facing increases of 100% to 1% and
4 in some cases even more. These increases are not happening in isolation. People are
5 already dealing with the cost of food, heating, electricity, transport and every other
6 household expense, and there is clear evidence of that pressure.

7
8 The 2026 Minimum Essential Standards of Living Research shows that the minimum
9 cost of living has risen by 3.8% in just one year and by 23.6% since 2020. It also
10 found that many households' depending on Social Welfare still do not have enough
11 income to meet even the minimum needs. So an increase in somebody's income does
12 not automatically mean that they have more money available to pay higher rent.

13
14 That is why we believe we also need a full breakdown today of how many
15 households are facing increases of 0-10%, 10-20%, 20-30%, 30-50% and 50-100%.
16 Because unless we know the scale of the increases across those bands we cannot
17 properly understand the impact the scheme is having.

18
19 This issue was raised back in April of '25 by my colleague Councillor Dermot
20 O'Brien.

21
22 Recently I had an old age pensioner crying on the phone to me because his increase
23 has increased by 100%. He did not know where the extra money was going to come
24 from. That is the reality behind this scheme. Behind every calculation is a person, a
25 pensioner, a parent or a family trying to manage on a limited income, and that is why
26 people have responded so strongly. More than 1,500 people have now signed our
27 petition asking this Council to stop and reconsider these rent increases. I will
28 formally present that petition to management today.

29
30 Our request is straightforward: Stop the implementation of the new Differential Rent
31 Scheme due to take effect on the 3rd of October; listen directly to the tenants
32 affected; review the scale of the increases and whether they are affordable for the
33 households being asked to pay them; and address the very serious concerns that have
34 emerged during this process.

1
2 This meeting is an opportunity for management to listen and act. John and I have
3 listened to tenants, we have heard the fear, the anger and the genuine worry that
4 exists. Our position is simple: Stop, listen, review.

5
6 I appreciate management's indication of deferring until the 7th of November but this
7 also coincides with an increase in fuel costs, and I think it is highly inappropriate that
8 right before Christmas that this is going to be due to be implemented.

9
10 If management is not prepared to stop the implementation of this scheme Councillor
11 John Ward and I are prepared to bring forward a direction under section 140 of the
12 Local Government Act 2001 seeking to stop its implementation and retain the
13 existing Differential Rent Scheme arrangements. I hope that this will not be
14 necessary but the people affected by these decisions deserve an answer today. Thank
15 you.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor O'Toole. Councillor Richmond.

17 COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And firstly, just thank
18 you Caroline, and probably the most important thing which has to be recognised here
19 is the huge body of work that the Council staff have undertaken, and as Caroline said
20 it is about thanking those in Rents and Housing. Above everything else, that can't go
21 unnoticed and particularly since the letters went out the staff who are actually
22 fielding the phone calls, and it's just to acknowledge their workload.

23
24 Firstly, and I speak today as the Chair of the Housing SPC, this was presented to us
25 back in February '25. The one thing, and from the outset I have to say the fact that
26 we're reviewing a rent system that hasn't been reviewed since 2019 is simply not
27 good enough and shouldn't be allowed to continue. If you're an Approved Housing
28 Body rent reviews are on a much more regular basis. I think that has probably fed
29 into an ability for some people in some areas to call, to use language -- and there's
30 been a misuse of language -- be it hikes and increase. When there is a review, and I
31 think it is highlighted there, that 77% of households impacted within the €49
32 increase or decrease, of the 5,100 households under the Wicklow Rental Scheme,
33 with the information on 4,519. Because there's 606 forms not returned. And that is,
34 the rent is based on income, and I would welcome the Chief Executive's decision to

1 postpone until November 7th. I think that does give the staff time to clarify but it
2 also gives time for the tenants because this is who is affected most by this. It gives
3 them time to raise any queries and deal with it all case-by-case.

4
5 And just, I want to touch on probably one thing, which as one of 32 councillors to
6 read about a meeting confirmed on an individual who's not elected to this chamber
7 personal Facebook simply is not good enough, and it shouldn't be tolerated that we
8 have to sit back and read about where we're going to be. And I think it shows a huge
9 disrespect to fellow councillors that information be relayed on Facebook, and it
10 shows a distinct lack of courtesy to the other 32 councillors who did not sign the
11 Notice of Motion. And what I would note is, it's a little bit concerning the number of
12 those who signed to have today's meeting are not able to attend online. But I think
13 this is a situation which shouldn't happen again if the review is taken on a more
14 regular basis, I think November is fair. I do think it gives us an opportunity -- and
15 it's very easy, we can throw percentages, and I'm loath to use percentages, and I do
16 think that some of the information that has been relayed on social media has been
17 false and has misled people to the point where we're here for a meeting to discuss
18 rents, social rents. And the timing of anyone whose rent is reviewed, the same as a
19 mortgage review, those in private accommodation, there's never a good time. But
20 that rent, it must be understood what the rent is for. I would like to get clarification
21 from the Executive that all those, the rent changes will be used for repair,
22 maintenance and the retrofitting of those houses within social stock.

23
24 So I think there's a huge amount to be learnt from this process. I think we
25 understand no review should be let go this long again, but in future as Elected
26 Members I think there should be a level of decorum where we do not have to read
27 about where we're going to be on a Monday on one else's Facebook. Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Ward.

29 COUNCILLOR WARD: I would like to say, yeah, thanks to Caroline for that
30 presentation, but that's all on paper. Myself and Warren have been out on the streets
31 dealing with real people who are stressed and who are scared, and they don't know
32 where to turn to. As a new councillor I have to say that I have been absolutely
33 overwhelmed by the public response to the Council's decision to increase rents under
34 this new Differential Rent Scheme. Over the past week I have been inundated with

1 phone calls and emails, messages from families, pensioners, tenants from right
2 across the county, people who are genuinely frightened about what the rent increase
3 will mean for them and their families. And I think it is important that we recognise
4 exactly who we're talking about here. Many of these tenants are among the most
5 vulnerable people in our society. They are people of modest incomes, pensions,
6 families, and who are already struggling to make ends meet due to the cost of living
7 crisis. And it is a cost of living crisis. As the councillor just commented there, that
8 yes, there's no such thing as a good time, but as tenants they have pointed to me that
9 they're often in homes that are far from perfect, more homes with inadequate heating,
10 poorly fitted windows and doors, poor insulation and significant energy costs. So to
11 receive a letter telling them that the rent is going to increase substantially is causing
12 enormous fear and distress.

13
14 The levels of increase is simply exorbitant, and what concerns me most is the impact
15 this will have on household finances. People have told me that they are already
16 making choices between heating their homes, buying food and paying bills. For
17 some families these increases could be the tipping point.

18
19 There's also very serious issues that need to be addressed here. Using the Council's
20 own figures, 606 tenants have had €50 penalty rent applied to their accounts on the
21 basis that they already failed to return the documents, but I can tell you that dozen of
22 tenants who have contacted me directly they have told me that they did return the
23 documents requested, including the financial information, bank details and
24 employment pay slips. So serious questions now need to be asked, and how this
25 information has been received, processed recorded and stored; how has it matched
26 against individual tenant's accounts; and how is the sensitive, personal and financial
27 information being held within the Council. These are minor administration
28 questions. We're talking about extremely sensitive personal information belonging
29 to hundreds of tenants. Given the concerns that they have raised with me, I believe
30 this matter needs to be referred to the Data Protection Commissioner for
31 investigation so that tenants can see and have confidence that their personal and
32 financial information will be properly collected, handled, stored and used.

33
34 But ultimately today is about people. My colleague Warren O'Toole and I have

1 spent many weeks speaking directly to tenants, listening to their experiences and
2 hearing the fear and anxiety that this scheme that has created. We are absolutely
3 convinced that the impact of these increases will be severe for many households.
4 This cannot simply be dismissed as a change to a rent calculation. These are people's
5 homes, the people's lives, and for some families these increases could be a tipping
6 point.

7
8 So let's be absolutely clear: If the Executive is not prepared to listen to these
9 concerns, as Warren has said, myself and him have no option but to serve a section
10 140 motion under the Local Government Act 2001 demanding that the Executive
11 stop this Differential Rent Scheme with immediate effect. We have listened to the
12 tenants on the streets. They're real people. They're not just figures on a piece of
13 paper. Now is time for the Executive to listen. Thank you.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Rachel.

15 MS GILLESPIE: Can I just remind members of the public that no recording is
16 permitted in the chamber. Thank you.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

18 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. So look it, not to go over old
19 ground because I know there'll be a lot of speakers looking to come in behind me,
20 but there is a lot of discrepancies I suppose in regards to the scheme and the previous
21 scheme, and I know it's an outdated scheme from seven years ago. No increase.

22
23 The first thing I want to could is welcome the Chief Executive putting this back to
24 the 7th of November. We were to have a workshop here, an in-person workshop on
25 Wednesday gone out, unfortunately that had to be cancelled and it went online where
26 a smaller number of councillors took part, and a number of questions were raised
27 there. One of them would have been this: That people need more time. The 3rd of
28 October is coming up very, very quickly. And I was fearful that people would end
29 up in arrears before they even started to get an answer to their questions. And I
30 know a lot of staff have been put to this, but a lot of the questions out there and a lot
31 of the examples that's been given to me I can't justify, I can't get my head around it,
32 in regards to the figures. I appreciate what we've got today and it's more clearer. It's
33 more evidence-based. But, for example, there's people out there who work as
34 cleaners, for example, in schools, there's people on school buses for children with

1 disabilities who only work effectively part-time. They're not working for the
2 summer, they're not working at Easter and Halloween. So for four months a year
3 they're off, and it appears that this is not taking that into effect. I suspect it is based
4 over the whole 12 months rather than eight months. And that could be recalculated
5 once you had the information but the shock of getting the letter currently explaining
6 the huge increases -- and these are people who are out working. A lot of them are
7 now thinking do I have to give up work, and it should never come to that where
8 people feel they have to give up their part-time work to keep the roof over their
9 heads.

10
11 I am particularly concerned in regards to our pensioners. Our old age pensioners.
12 And again, Chief Executive, I want to thank you for having the walk-in clinics. I
13 think that's hugely important because a lot of them would need the opportunity to sit
14 down face-to-face with the staff. I think to make the staff available to them is to be
15 welcomed by all 32 councillors.

16
17 The misconception out is there is that the Elected Members of Wicklow County
18 Council set the rates for rents within County Wicklow. And again, that's been
19 clarified here and everyone was aware of that but yet still some constituents out there
20 that I have been talking to seem to be under the impression that perhaps there's only
21 30 councillors in the chamber, not 32, who are concerned about their rents and that
22 we set the rents somehow. So it is an Executive decision by the Senior Management
23 of Wicklow County Council as in all Local Authorities.

24
25 Can I discuss in regards to the penalty rent, the 606 penalty rent. And I think I asked
26 on Wednesday, it's not a new thing, apparently it was in the previous scheme, and I
27 was looking for figures around the collection rate on that penalty rent and where
28 does it go. Does it go into the same pot of money in regards of the overall rents?
29 Again I think, you know, to give those people more time, the likes of the 7th of
30 November is pushing it out to give the staff and those people to get their information
31 in, but it's a lot. 606 is a huge amount of work to get through. If you take on top of
32 that you've to regularise 94 tenancies, you also say there's still 40 to complete from
33 the permission to reside. That alone, without the people who are not involved in
34 those figures, the people who are contacting us on a regular basis, who are concerned

1 about their rents, and I would encourage everybody to appeal, put in their appeal, put
2 in their information, and I think the walk-in clinic is ideal for people to address that.

3

4 Our iHouse system that we use within the Local Authority. It's my understanding
5 that there's only three Local Authorities that don't have a system in place where we're
6 directly connected to Revenue and the Department of Social Protection. So as
7 income changes it would update automatically within our system. And again, this is
8 something that I am told, I'm not sure whether it can be done, our IT experts are here,
9 but I think if we're one of only three not using that system we really should be using
10 it, and maybe it is something worth looking into. So therefore people won't end up
11 in arrears because they didn't notify or their circumstances have changed. Because in
12 a lot of cases their circumstances will change where they should have a decrease. It
13 is not always about an increase.

14

15 I would also say in regards to the example used for a person earning 200,000 who is
16 in a Local Authority house. Like, I have never met a person like that in my life.
17 And, you know, I'd say it is a rare example. Those people should have bought a
18 house on that income. I know young families out there who wouldn't see the colour
19 of that and they're struggling to get on the property ladder in regards to buying
20 houses. Also in regards to the HAP tenants, the increase affects them as well. So, as
21 you say, it is seven and a half thousand people, that's seven and a half thousand
22 documentation to be collated and brought in here.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Councillor Snell, I already added a minute on so you
24 actually had six minutes. I will bring you back in after if that is okay. Thank you.
25 Councillor Stokes online.

26 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And a big thank you to
27 Caroline for the presentation. I'm also very complimentary of the housing staff in
28 general. I find them to be very dedicated and professional people, and I'm sure they
29 don't enjoy sending out letters, you know, to increase anybody's rent. And I'm very
30 happy of course to support this motion. I am very thankful to Councillor John and
31 Councillor Warren for tabling it, and I'm happy to agree. I also agree with
32 Councillor Richmond. I feel very strongly that we probably need to have a more
33 regular rent review because then payments that are going up would be more
34 staggered. For some people this has been a very sharp increase. And some people

1 just aren't aware that they need to pay more or amend the amount of the review. I
2 think that the proof is that some people out there are actually overpaying, and I am
3 sure that in a cost of living crisis if people thought that they were overpaying,
4 because some people's rents are actually going down, then they would certainly
5 highlight this. And so, I do have a question, and I do appreciate that the Chief
6 Executive mentioned that there won't be any chasing of money, any kind of back
7 rent, but I'm wondering if people who have been overpaying their rent will they get a
8 backdated payment from Wicklow County Council or some sort of future discount. I
9 think that would be very much appreciated by people.

10
11 And just to say I am concerned about the level of notice. And I do appreciate that
12 the Chief Executive has indicated November 5th for extending the implementation of
13 the new rent, but I am very concerned that it is still very close to the festive season. I
14 mean I certainly think the new year would be better. But also bearing in mind that a
15 lot of people out there, you know, are living month-to-month and they may have a
16 range of commitments. It takes time to adjust. If somebody may have a car payment
17 or a loan, it is very difficult to adjust even with a month's notice. So I would
18 personally look for more flexibility. And I have had a range of local constituents
19 getting in touch with me, and it is a sharp increase for some people. You know one
20 family who contacted me said they're going up from 200 to 400. I have another case
21 where my local Greystones Family Resource Centre got in touch, you know, and
22 there was a family there where they're having an increase yet the Family Resource
23 Centre is helping them out with basic necessities like toothpaste. So there are some
24 really difficult cases. Another case of a mum who is on a very limited income with a
25 child who is studying in college, you know, and doesn't know what to do about their
26 increase. I think a lot of people, and I certainly, would love to see a little bit more
27 flexibility. I do appreciate the Chief Executive has indicated some flexibility, but I
28 just think it is so close to the festive season it is going to be really, really difficult for
29 a lot of people. Those are my comments, and I am fully in support of the motion.
30 Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Stokes. Councillor Dunne.

32 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I suppose it was
33 mentioned earlier by Councillor Richmond about the process and how things had
34 gone on. I fully support the meeting. I think it is good for us to sit down in front of

1 the Executive and have a chat about the process and that. I have been fairly
2 disappointed that meetings -- the way the meeting was called, other people seemed to
3 know about it long before members of this chamber, and even your own TD seemed
4 to have it up on social media before I knew about it personally. Also, you had a
5 meeting with the municipal district chairs. Now in principle that's a good idea but
6 the fact that Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin don't have any chairs excluded us from having
7 any input. And what surely should have been done was, the party whips should have
8 been brought in and spoken to rather than municipal district chairs. I think that was
9 an error of judgment and it comes from probably a lack of experience.

10

11 I look at this, I'm delighted that the Chief Executive wants to defer it, I'd defer it a bit
12 longer. I think coming into Christmas it is the wrong time to have this. On top of
13 the cost of living like I seen in yesterday's Independent home heating oil has gone up
14 €1,500, electricity €600. You know, there's so much going on, like, you know what I
15 mean. Petrol and diesel gone up as well. It seems to be a lot for the public to take at
16 the moment. I accept it is an Executive decision and you can decide what you want
17 to do but we're here to let you know the feeling within our communities, how things
18 are going. And, you know, listen, everybody in here today is going to say that
19 they're getting phone calls and they're this and that. Councillor Snell mentioned
20 about the walk-in clinics, I think that's a really good idea because of the amount of
21 public anger out there people are ringing in and struggling to get through and things
22 like that. So I think that's a great idea and I think you should follow up on that.

23

24 So as a party I think we're all listening to what is going to happen here, I'm sure
25 there'll be some motions coming, and we're not going to make a decision. We will
26 probably call for a recess at some stage to go off and look at different options that
27 come before us. Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Dunne. I think I would like to take a
29 right of reply there.

30 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Yeah.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: So I called the meeting of the MD Chair as County Chair to
32 understand what was happening across the Chair. Each Chair represents their district
33 as a whole, not a specific party. The suggestion that I should have convened party
34 reps does not hold up when Wicklow has a significant amount of Independent

1 councillors, and if I was just to meet with the party reps then I would be excluding
2 the Independent councillors. I would have to invite all the Independent councillors.
3 In terms of what went out on social media, as I said in my email that you all got on
4 30 minutes past 9 on Sunday morning, the day after I had the letter to convene the
5 special meeting, I feel that Deputy Grady was premature to go out with that
6 information because the meeting hadn't been finalised and we hadn't agreed it within
7 the time. That's all I really want to say on the matter because people have come here
8 today to hear about the rents, not criticisms of the process. I am going to invite
9 Councillor Behan in.

10 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Cathaoirleach, first of all, can I thank Caroline for the
11 very detailed presentation and I know this is probably her third or fourth time
12 making a similar presentation, and I also want to join in the tributes to all of her staff
13 for the work they have to do. They might not like doing it but it is part of their job.
14 We also have a job to represent the people who are affected by these decisions. And
15 I want to remind members that when this whole idea of an amalgamation of the two
16 schemes was raised I raised very serious objections to it because as far as I am
17 concerned, and I still believe this, it is our duty and our decision whether this scheme
18 is implemented or not. We have the power under the Local Government Act 2001 to
19 make a Differential Rent Scheme. When I said this at the meeting the Chief
20 Executive went off and got senior counsel's advice and oh yes, you do but the
21 Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, that particular section, that sentence hasn't
22 been commenced by any Minister, therefore you don't have the power.

23
24 So we're in a situation now where the Local Government Act intended for
25 councillors to make decisions about rent schemes when we're setting up a new
26 scheme. And this is a new scheme. This is an amalgamation of two other schemes.
27 It is a new scheme. It is within our powers. When the two councillors who, and I
28 compliment them for calling the meeting, said if the Chief Executive does not pay
29 attention to what we are saying here today, which is that this entire proposal needs to
30 be withdrawn and remade in accordance with our wishes, if she does not do this I
31 will certainly be happy to sign a section 140 ordering the Chief Executive to do it.
32 Now, I'm quite sure the Chief Executive doesn't want to get into that position but as
33 far as I'm concerned we are the ones who have the power to make the decisions on
34 this, and we should stick together on that as far as I am concerned.

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I will make another couple of other points. I really, really do not like to see the fact that we have extra security brought in today because members of the public might want to come and listen to something that we say. It is an utter disgrace to have security standing on the door as if these people have done something wrong. They have done nothing wrong. They are going to be affected by decisions made by the top table, they're entitled to hear what we have to say, and they are entitled to be here without getting the impression that somebody thinks they're here to cause trouble. That should not be happening, and I completely and utterly reject what happened here this morning with regard to that.

I know of a lot of people who are affected by this decision but in particular older people. I mean one person I spoke to outside, her rent is going up by €40 a week. Another elderly couple, very elderly couple, their rent is going from €50 to €100. Now, I know the Chief Executive is a humane person, I have dealt with her on a number of very sensitive issues and I have great confidence in her humanity but I honestly say to you, Chief Executive, you cannot surely agree that an old person in a time of cost of living crisis can be expected to pay almost double what they have been charged by Wicklow County Council for their rent. And because they're old most of their houses are in very, very bad condition, and Wicklow County Council as a landlord is not doing anything to live up to their responsibilities to get those houses up to proper conditions.

So, like, that's a major issue for me. Another issue is that there are over a million euros in rent arrears owing to this Council which have never been collected, and my fear and my feeling is that the people who do pay their rent are being punished for the fact that Wicklow County Council has allowed this situation to develop over many, many years. So basically if you pay your rent you're the one that's going to get punished. I think that is absolutely immoral as well.

I'll finish on this point: I know there are changes that will help people who are on on child maintenance payments and Carer's Allowance, that is a good thing and I think who are people affected by those changes are happy about that particular change, but that is a national policy and the Council has no choice but to implement that. So

1 please do not present it as concession. It is not. It is national policy and it must be
2 done and should not be withdrawn.

3

4 The final point I would make is that there is a budget coming up in a week's time. I
5 was at a meeting in Moate yesterday, thousands of people turned up, about the cost
6 of living crisis. Many of those people are people affected by the cost of fuel and
7 heating, et cetera. If this great Government gives a few extra euros in the pension or
8 social welfare next Tuesday week it will be more than wiped out by these particular
9 increases and on that basis therefore I am completely opposed to it and I think we
10 need to go back to the drawing board. Thank you.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Behan. Councillor Stapleton.

12 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yeah, thank you, Chair. And I think regardless of
13 how this meeting was called or came about I do think it is a really important meeting.
14 I think it is really good to discuss social housing and the policy we have around that.
15 We need social housing, council housing that works in this county, and a big part of
16 that is making sure that the proper repair and maintenance of our housing stock is
17 properly funded, and I think a huge part of that comes from having an effective and
18 fair rent policy that works, that is based on people's ability to pay.

19

20 I think at the outset looking at the policy it is a fair one but I think clearly there are
21 individual circumstances that members are highlighting where they see unjust or
22 unfair rent increases, but I would really welcome the members actually pointing out
23 what within the policy is leading to those unjust or unfair rent increases, because it's
24 very easy to say oh, it is dreadful, people are having to pay more rent, but if we can't
25 point to the parts of our policy that are actually causing the unjust and the unfair
26 increases in rent then we're just saying no to crazy situations where we'd essentially
27 be saying that someone should be judged on their income in 2019 even though in the
28 extreme they could be earning €200,000 in gross income now, and we'd be saying
29 let's just stop, pause and leave everything in 2019. I think that's absolute madness
30 when we're looking to fund the proper repair and maintenance and people could be
31 contributing more to it.

32

33 I would like to hear from the Executive in terms of if we pause a pause on this for
34 one month, two months, three months, six months, what would be the impact in

1 terms of the lower amount of funding that would be available for repairs and
2 maintenance of our housing stock. Because I think we have to take this or the
3 Executive should be taking the decision in the round, and I think that's important,
4 that the members know how those consideration feed in. Because I think ultimately,
5 I know we've discussed, that's on the policy side of things, I think the process
6 members have made clear and I think I would be very aligned with that, you know
7 this could have been handled and done better.

8
9 I think it would be important for rent reviews to be done more regularly than every
10 seven years so people don't have that extreme increase or shock when they would
11 have prepared kind of budgets and household budgets in advance. And to that point
12 I would raise whether there is the possibility of like an online system or portal where
13 we could look into or even a way for people to easier self-assess their own income,
14 and through that process the amount of people I have had call me who have seen a
15 number on page in terms of what their rent will be and they don't understand how it
16 would be calculated. So I think if it could be laid out that these are the numbers
17 we've taken and based on a formula are laying out really clearly where their rent is
18 coming from because I think there are probably cases where rent has been calculated
19 incorrectly.

20
21 But the final point I would make on the stop, pause, review. Like, I was shocked to
22 see that 13% are having their rents decrease. That's 500 people. Are we saying that
23 we should stop, pause and review and allow them to keep paying higher rents than
24 they should be? I don't think that would necessarily be fair. Because I think as a
25 whole if we agree that the policy is correct then this isn't actually about increasing or
26 decreasing rent, it's just making sure that we have people paying the correct rent, and
27 I think if we can get to that point as a council then our Social Housing Policy and our
28 approach to social housing in the county as a whole will be much better. So look,
29 they're my few points. But thank you very much for the debate.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Stapleton. Councillor Alvey online.
31 Councillor Alvey sorry, one moment we can't hear you. You're on mute, Councillor
32 Alvey. I think you might have to take your headphones out. We'll come back to
33 you. It is definitely your end, your mic is enabled. Okay. We will go to Councillor
34 Glennon.

1 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'd like to thank Caroline
2 and the Chief Executive for their opening remarks, and I am very pleased to see that
3 there is a deferral put in place and that she's going to have some workshops that
4 people can come in and discuss the increases that they find difficult to understand. I
5 would ask you to include a clinic in West Wicklow as well. You mentioned
6 Wicklow and Bray. I think once again the west should not be forgotten about
7 because this is an issue that affects people right from Shillelagh up to Blessington.
8 I'm sure all my colleagues have had numerous representations made to them as well.

9
10 Just to give you a little sample of -- I am not going to name people or anything like
11 that. Two old aged pensioners, an increase of €27, I will point out they only got a
12 fiver each in the last budget, and they find they will have to go short on food to pay
13 it. There is a number of cases. Another one is rent of €190.50 per week that works
14 out at €952 for a five-week month. There's another one then, a person in
15 employment and the husband is in employment, not particularly well paid
16 employment but reasonable employment, gone from €70 to €322 per week, their
17 rent. Now I have forwarded that to Mr Nicholson who has undertook to have a look
18 at it. A single mum then who is working part-time, her rent has gone to €70 per
19 week. She's only got part-time employment and she will find it very difficult to live.
20 They're an example of some of the cases.

21
22 And the deferral, and whilst some of my colleagues suggest it should be put back a
23 bit further, I have no difficulty with the date provided everyone's concerns have been
24 properly looked into before the date. And if not, then the date should go back
25 beyond the 1st of November. People should have the right to canvass their case and
26 get a response, a meaningful response, to the difficulties they see with their rent. So
27 that's basically all I am going to say at this point until we see what other motions
28 come before the chamber, and thank you.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

30 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you, and I just want to start off as well by
31 thanking Caroline and the staff. I know they're only doing their jobs and it's not
32 personal, and you know it is very difficult to be at the other end of the phone when
33 people are in hardship and you know people's reality, so I just want to thank them for
34 the work that they are doing and I think just the kindness that they're showing to a lot

1 of people that are in distress.

2

3 I would like to propose, I think the biggest issue with this rent review has been the
4 short timeline on it. I think it's spiralled a lot of people into a sense of panic, with the
5 three-week period. And I thank the Chief Executive for extending it but I think it
6 really needs to be extended by six months, keeping the rents with their existing rent
7 being paid for that six months and no retrospective increases after that six months. I
8 think that we need that time to adjust. I think people need that time to adjust their
9 own personal finances and just to get the facts and start dealing with the individual
10 cases and also looking at their other expenses that have to be taken into account.
11 Because people have loans. People might look on paper that they have an income
12 coming in but there might be most of that money going out on a loan or money spent
13 on doing up their houses. I spoke to one old lady and she said that the new rent
14 increase, like her house hasn't been invested in by the Council in her duration there.
15 She was promised insulation in 2016 which never happened. She's using her excess,
16 any excess income to actually keep the upkeep an old house that's over 60 years old.
17 And you know when you compare that same person with the same income living in a
18 newer house in an A-rated house there's no equality there at all. One person is
19 having to spend money on an old house and energy costs on an old house where the
20 very same person with the same money coming in in a new A-rated house has a lot
21 more discretionary income.

22

23 The cost of living is an issue as well. Like, you know, energy has gone up. We're
24 not taking into account the cost of people on ordinary wages commuting up and
25 down to Dublin and the cost of fuel, the cost of heating old houses as well. Family,
26 kids. I've had some people on to me that their kids were due to go to college, that
27 hasn't been taken into account. They're now reconsidering if they can actually afford
28 for children to go to college. Some people are thinking they'd be better off to give up
29 their low paid job. I think giving a six-month period to cool everything down, look
30 at the facts, give the staff time to properly engage with people, and the clinics need
31 to be in every municipal district, I agree with Councillor Glennon, because people
32 don't have transport and it needs to be accessible for people.

33

34 I want to commend the work that MABS have done. They have taken a lot of

1 people's queries and they are there to support anybody in difficulty. I think the
2 hardship clause, I think that needs to be looked at as well. And you know again back
3 to people have loans and people have outgoings, you know that are just -- This is
4 pushing some people over the edge, and some people are just barely keeping their
5 heads above water. And I just think the speed of this and the short time of the three
6 weeks has just -- you know, it's people's mental health and people that are vulnerable
7 and not able to process this. In some cases we have taken away their future. You
8 know, they might have planned little treats for themselves or you know just things to
9 look forward to. When people have nothing left to look forward to we take away
10 hope. It impacts mental health, it impacts their physical health. And I just think that
11 six months will give us time to reassess the whole situation, and it needs to be
12 assessed at a national level as well, because the cost of living is just driving people
13 over the edge. Thank you.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I am going to try Councillor Alvey
15 online again.

16 COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Can you hear me?

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, we can hear you. Thank you.

18 COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just joined on my phone there.
19 Apologies about that. Yeah, look, I think it's very clear people are facing increases
20 which is really hard for us as councillors to explain or to justify to them, especially
21 as many speakers have mentioned already the cost of living crisis that is ongoing and
22 so much pressure is being put by representatives like ourselves on the Government to
23 give a few euro back to people while at the same time our own Council now is
24 bringing in this new change.

25

26 Something really specific I would like to ask about and this lends itself to Councillor
27 Stapleton's question: What specifically in the scheme is causing an issue? And so, it
28 is something I would like to ask the Executive about. You know, digging deeper into
29 the formula that is being used in the scheme. The level of income disregarded is set
30 at €188. That was the base Social Welfare level back in 2016. Ten years ago. So
31 it's increased 30% since then to €244. Why have we not also increased our income
32 disregard in the exact same time? To follow the ethos of what the concept of that is
33 about if you are to increase every single time as well.

34

1 What this means, to take an example of an actual person. If someone was on a state
2 pension they would have been expected to pay €39 roughly in 2019 which would
3 have been 16% of their weekly income, now because their level of income has gone
4 above this disregard to such a high extent they would be expected to pay
5 approximately €50 in 2026, which is 18% of their weekly income. So because we
6 haven't increased the disregard at the same level as the baseline Social Welfare we
7 have effectively increased people's rents. It might only seem like a very small few
8 percentage but you know I spent a long time working in St Vincent de Paul and a
9 few euro every single week can help when doing your weekly shopping.

10
11 I absolutely think this scheme needs to be paused. I think there's oversight here and I
12 would like to hear back from the Executive specifically about that. However, I
13 would say that I would really like to acknowledge the fact that Carer's Allowance
14 and child maintenance payments are now disregarded. I know it's something that my
15 colleague Cathaoirleach Winstanley has done a lot of advocating on behalf of, and I
16 have heard directly from a number of tenants around the impact this is going to have
17 for them. A mother who is in an Approved Housing Body and has had her rent
18 reviewed every single year. Her rent was reviewed at the start of this year and
19 because of the child maintenance payments they put her up to €141 payment a week
20 when in reality we realised she should only be paying a minimum of €30 a week. So
21 a very long pause would have a detrimental impact for her because she is being
22 overcharged. We need to strike a balance between the length of the pause but
23 without a doubt we need to have a pause and look at this again because the increases
24 are unjustified considering the cost of living crisis. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor O'Brien.

26 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you for
27 facilitating this meeting and to the Executive because it is worthy to have it. Just a
28 couple of things. I actually agree with a lot of what has been said and I'm not going
29 to repeat most of it. Just two things to start off with though. I hope lessons can be
30 learned here on two aspects. Number one, how the meeting was called. It was
31 disrespectful to members. But that is a minor issue. I just mention just so lessons
32 can be learned going forward. That's all I'm saying there. The second lesson is the
33 time it takes to do a rent review. I think seven years is too long. I think that has to
34 be -- and I think it is acknowledged that it has taken too long. Can I thank Caroline

1 to the presentation there today. It was well worthwhile and thank Director Nicholson
2 by the way who I have also engaged with for the last number of weeks since I start
3 getting the calls. Can I acknowledge the staff who are having to return the calls to
4 people because they're human as well. Some of them are in social housing
5 themselves. They feel the brunt of this. I want to say that after speaking to a number
6 of them my heart goes out to them as well because it has been said in here they're
7 only doing their job too, they're not on huge money here, and my heart goes out for
8 them. I hope the resources can be put in in the next month to deal with the queries.

9
10 In terms of what I have been dealing with over the last couple of weeks since this
11 arose is that people living in older stock, and it has been said here today that, you
12 know, they're looking at people living in A-rated houses and they're paying the exact
13 same rent in a house that might be 20 to 25 years old. I have a specific question
14 about that: Is there a timeframe for a rollout? And I know this is very difficult given
15 that we have a high demand here. How can we go back and justify these rent
16 increases when people are sitting in homes when the wind is actually blowing in
17 through their doors and windows, and they're paying higher and higher costs to heat
18 the house? At least if we have some sort of timeframe to go out to these people and
19 say this is what is going to happen here and this is the reason, because I think it's
20 very unfair on them to have to pay higher rent now with this increase and sitting in a
21 cold house for the winter. So I would like to see in terms of some sort of timeframe
22 for the retrofitting of houses because we do have an extensive stock that needs to be
23 brought up to code.

24
25 I also want to raise the issue of, and I think someone else raised it there, Councillor
26 Alvey, in terms of hardship. We're dealing with HAP tenants. The HAP system is a
27 joke, and there is no other way of putting it. It is a joke. People are now paying up
28 to a certain amount but then the landlords are collecting money off them as well. So
29 now what's happening is they're going to face an increase in their rent while also
30 trying to manage paying the excess in their HAP payments as well. And I hope that's
31 taken into account, because dealing with a couple of people, my God I don't know
32 how they're going to find the money to be quite honest with you. These are good
33 people, hard-working, and done nothing wrong here.

34

1 In terms of older people and pensioners, I agree with Councillor Alvey, it is
2 something I was going to raise in terms of the threshold because older people or
3 people with disabilities have no chance to go out and earn extra money. They're
4 stuck with this figure no matter what happens. So I would like to know is there some
5 sort of hardship clause that can be looked at in terms of older people or people with
6 disabilities who have no access or no way of getting out to earn extra money but yet
7 they are facing these rent increases.

8
9 It is a tough meeting today. I agree with a lot of what has been said. It is very
10 emotional. But I also want to emphasise that we're not indifferent. We're human.
11 Every one of us, no matter if you are in a party or not in a party, we hear the
12 suffering. We have family members living in social housing. And there's calls for
13 this and there's calls for that. It is an Executive decision. But we have to respect it.
14 We got two legal opinions on it and that is the case.

15
16 So I'll finish by saying only two weeks ago we had a TD assaulted in Dublin. So all
17 I'm asking for is the rhetoric to be turned down. So I am asking, let's tone down the
18 rhetoric. I know it is hard for people. I know it is hard for people not to play
19 political football with this. Let's work here for the people that sent us here. Don't
20 use this as a political football, because I won't, and I'm sure a lot of my colleagues
21 here won't either. Let's work together with the Executive who are reasonable people,
22 and I'm not just saying that for the sake of saying it, but I think the solution can be
23 found here. I think a solution can be found here. I want to thank the Chief
24 Executive for the month pause on this. I think it will give the time for the staff but
25 make sure you put the resources in to look after those staff and make sure we get
26 back to people. Thank you very much.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Bourke.

28 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, thank you very much. I'd just like to
29 raise a flag there, after I heard two or three councillors suggesting that we might be
30 rushing in with a section 140, and I would like the Chief Executive to clarify would
31 that be legally acceptable. Because the last time we brought in a section 140 here to
32 direct the management to do something we ended up in the High Court and it cost a
33 lot of the councillors a lot of money and the Council a lot of money. So before we
34 go down that rabbit hole I think we should have clarity as to whether it would be

1 accepted or not. Thank you.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. The CEO will clarify that now.

3 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, members. Thank you, Cathaoirleach. As I suppose
4 Councillor Behan has alluded to, the intention of the legislation was that the making
5 of a rent scheme would be a reserve function but that was never enacted. So as the
6 legislation stands the making of a rent scheme is an Executive function, which means
7 the responsibility lies with me and the team here. So any section 140 that directs me
8 to change or stop or pause the rent scheme would be ultra vires, would be out of
9 order and not enforceable by law.

10 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I challenge that, Cathaoirleach. On a point of order.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, Councillor Behan.

12 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I would completely challenge that. The purpose of the
13 section 140 is to direct to take over the functions of the Chief Executive with regard
14 to any particular aspect of the Council's activities. So I would very much disagree
15 with you. You're trying to reroute the legislation there, Chief Executive, by saying
16 that. The only restriction is in planning matters, but not in relation to a situation such
17 as this. That's just my opinion, Cathaoirleach. I want to make that. Thank you.

18 MS O'GORMAN: Just to clarify: The advice that we have, and has been challenged
19 in other Local Authorities, that a section 140 on rent matters is ultra vires.

20 MS GILLESPIE: Can I just remind members of the public in the gallery, please
21 remain silent. Thank you.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Neary.

23 COUNCILLOR NEARY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, in the private sector
24 landlords can only increase rent by 2% annually with 90 days' notice. Our tenants
25 have been 18 days' notice with increases of up to 100% which is unfair and
26 extremely hard on families. In my council estate some people are already paying
27 high rents for years and have nothing to show for it whilst living with illegal
28 dumping, open drug dealing, antisocial behaviour and the neighbourhood overall is
29 being mismanaged and ill-maintained. So my question is: What is the plan for the
30 extra rent money because it is never going back into our communities? Thank you,
31 Cathaoirleach.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Scott online.

33 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Can you hear me?

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, we can hear you.

1 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thank you. Thanks, Caroline, for your presentation and
2 the information at the workshop last week as well. I'll be brief. I broadly support a
3 rent review. I'm confused as to why this wouldn't have been reviewed since 2019. I
4 think that was a mistake and that is something that needs to be considered for a more
5 regular review to happen as we move forward. On one hand today the Council is
6 saying that the rent review was based on incomes and that rents should be affordable,
7 and that sounds good on paper. However, at the same time people have been in
8 contact with us who are genuinely unable to afford the increases that have been put
9 on to them. I am still not clear from the workshop last week or from the presentation
10 today really where that that disconnect is happening. I think Councillor Alvey
11 alluded to that earlier on. I think there needs to be time to interrogate this, to figure
12 out where the calculation let's people fall between the cracks and be
13 disproportionately affected by the Rent Review. That is something that concerns me.

14
15 I think that the timeframe on this has been way too short. I think that has been
16 misjudged. I appreciate the effort that has gone in, the very laborious effort it was by
17 the Council staff, putting through paperwork, however the timeframe between
18 notifying tenants and them having to find the increase is unacceptable, particularly
19 coming into the winter with the cost of fuel and oil this winter. Probably an increase
20 in rent, whatever that may be, may be a tipping point for some people. I think the
21 timing was really poor. I would support a pause on this until the spring. I think that
22 time is needed for people to be able to contact the Council, appeal if necessary, make
23 sure all documentation is taken into consideration and I think that is only right and
24 only fair.

25
26 I just want to say one more thing. I would like to hear from the Executive at the
27 meeting today as to where that increased revenue is going to be put in terms of
28 repairs and retrofitting. The Government at the moment only give pittance to Local
29 Authorities so we are very slowly moving through our housing stock in terms of
30 retrofitting. I know from Council stock through our own district the amount of
31 money allocated to repairs again is small, it is challenging. Again, it is unfair on
32 people who are living in, you know, mouldy houses with doors and windows where
33 the heat is flying out of them to have to heat their homes and also deal with the rent
34 increase. So I would like to see more detail on what exactly that revenue will be,

1 how that will be distributed properly and a plan of action for properly maintaining
2 retrofitting of Council stock. Thank you.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Duddy online.

4 COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Go raibh mile maith agat, Cathaoirleach. I would like to
5 say I welcome the huge amount of work the officials have done in relation to the rent
6 review and I welcome the proposed delay in implementing it. I do think that delay
7 isn't long enough. There's huge pressures on people, whether it is coming up to
8 Christmas, start of college, the dreadful cost of living crisis, and of course the fuel
9 increases. So I think a delay, a further delay really is required, and I would advise as
10 the lowest bar a 90-day requirement as is imposed on private landlords, a 90-day
11 timeframe in which we impose rent increases on tenants. Certainly the scheme
12 seems to have caught tenants unaware. I think it is a very, very bad time.

13

14 Likewise, I would question why it has taken seven years for a rent review to have
15 taken place. I think if (inaudible) are bad for the County Council the tenants really
16 shouldn't be taking the brunt of that. So go raibh mile maith agat, Cathaoirleach.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor O'Neill.

18 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. If you look back at the minutes
19 of last February, I raised the issue here about these rent increases coming online and
20 sadly I didn't get much support from anyone. There was more debate that day on the
21 amount of junkets that were being lined up by quite a few people in the chamber
22 here. They were going all over the world for St Patrick's Day, and I reminded
23 councillors here of the pressure that would be on the ordinary people, which I think
24 this was due in March of this year. It's a real live issue. Again I think Councillor
25 Behan pointed out there about the security here today. You know, I think it is a bit
26 overdone maybe. I think the people there in the gallery are ordinary, decent people
27 who are concerned and worried about this increase.

28

29 Could I also thank Caroline for her presentation there. She explained things very
30 clearly to everyone I think.

31

32 What I notice is the real fear in people of this rent increase. I have talked to some
33 people, old age pensioners they're being caught by this, other families are. I know a
34 family, a couple, €400 a week of an increase. It's kind of all over the place. But I

1 think the big fear in the people that I am dealing with, they're including not only this
2 rent increase but they're including, you know, what's coming down the road for this
3 country, the increase in everything; fuel, the price of keeping a dinner on the table
4 nowadays. There's a lot of challenges coming. So I think that's a mixture. Because
5 in West Wicklow, you know, I talk to people who are tenants of housing bodies and
6 people in private rent, and I mean there are increases there all the time, but the whole
7 fear I really believe is, and maybe the people who are taking an interest in this
8 chamber here this morning, some Elected Members of Leinster House, could bring it
9 back to the Leinster House people, that you know that's where these increases are
10 coming from. This is where we're being slaughtered.

11

12 I mean I just pointed out there during the week, for example this whole thing of the
13 oil and the fuel. I stopped off in Ashford there on the way for my diesel on the way
14 over, and it was €2.10 I think it was. Six months ago it was something like €1.70.
15 So we get governments and they talk about holding back increases. There's huge
16 increases that have happened and that's continuing to happen. So I'd appeal to
17 maybe that we could stop, and I welcome the Chief Executive's pausing on the
18 situation and maybe the probability of opening a centre so people can drop in and
19 discuss and see where we're going from from here. But there is real concern, and I
20 think it is true concern. It is the fear of what is coming down the line in this country,
21 you know.

22

23 Again I don't know, I'm the member of the SPC, the Housing SPC, and there was a
24 meeting organised for Wednesday. I travelled from Blessington over here and the
25 meeting was called off. It was online instead at late notice. But I do want to ask the
26 Cathaoirleach here, what role does she play in organising this meeting here this
27 morning? I got a clip that John Brady, a TD for the county, had organised the
28 meeting at 2 o'clock today and then I heard that it was organised for 10 o'clock this
29 morning. So it's not for Jennifer Whitmore or John Brady to be running the chamber
30 here. I would ask the Chief Executive what role did you play as regards social
31 media, if you did have any, with the TDs? Go raibh maith agat.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. And I'm happy to answer that. So on Friday I
33 became aware on social media that I was going to be demanded to hold a special
34 meeting on social media. So I commented on Deputy Brady's post to say that I had

1 not received a letter asking for a special meeting. So Councillor O'Toole followed
2 up with me on the Saturday and I was given a letter which was in line with standing
3 orders. So there was enough people requesting a special meeting. So I spoke to
4 Emer on the Saturday afternoon to verify whether she would be available or not.
5 And then I spoke to Councillor O'Toole to say that in principle a meeting could
6 happen but no times at that point had been confirmed, because I needed to speak to
7 everyone involved because I was very aware myself that this afternoon I have an
8 SPC meeting I'm chairing, so it couldn't automatically be the afternoon. So I just
9 want to let you know I called this meeting in line with standing orders.

10 MS GILLESPIE: Sorry, can I ask please members of the public to -- Thank you.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: So I think that that answers the question, I hope. This
12 meeting was called in line with standing orders, and if it's okay I will --

13 MS GILLESPIE: Please can I ask please for silence in the gallery? Thank you.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor O'Toole.

15 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. There's a lot after happening
16 there in a few minutes but look it I want to go back to the section 140. And I think if
17 the Chief Executive ignores this legally binding motion there's a serious breach of
18 local democracy and it must be challenged. And I want to highlight a fact: South
19 Dublin County Council in June of '26, the exact same motion, the exact same
20 circumstances was presented and it was passed. Thank you.

21 MS O'GORMAN: There's absolutely no issue with the passing of the motion. Let
22 me be very clear about that. It is the effect of the motion after it has been passed is
23 where the issue is legally. The chamber, you can pass whatever motions you see fit
24 by section 140 or by whatever other means, but you cannot direct me to do
25 something that I am lawfully obligated to do. It is an Executive function of this
26 Local Authority. There's no issue with the motion being passed at all. I just want to
27 be very, very clear about that.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Kennedy.

29 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to all the staff for
30 the work they have done but people are worried. There are a couple of things I
31 would like to bring up, and I will go through them randomly.

32

33 Caroline, thanks for the presentation. But in your presentation, Caroline, I think if I
34 saw it properly it said that somebody on disability paying rent at €27.80 -- in 2019

1 was paying €27.80. I don't think it was 42 -- I think you indicate there it was €42.50.
2 And a pensioner was paying €38.10. I think that was €30 in 2019 but maybe you
3 could correct that for me. I think those two figures in my calculations seem a little
4 off. I think they were €27.80, not €42.50 and they were paying €30 not €38.50.

5

6 The other thing that I would like to bring up is, and Councillor Alvey brought it up
7 earlier on, very welcomed, the fact that somebody receiving maintenance that that
8 wasn't used in the calculation. But it is used in the calculation of the other partner or
9 parent that's paying it out. So they do pay it. So it is taken into that calculation. So
10 it is taken on one side, not taken on the other. But you can't take it twice so it
11 actually is included.

12

13 The other thing I would like to bring up is: If there's an adult child who has just
14 finished college seeking employment they're being charged €30 even if they are not
15 receiving any payment at all. That family is being charged €30 for that adult child
16 who has just finished college. Now, it states in the Rent Scheme: "A sub-earner is
17 someone other than the tenant who has an income." In my opinion, I don't think the
18 parent should be getting charged for that person, that adult living in the house if
19 they've just finished college.

20

21 The other thing I'd like to bring up is: Deduction at the standard Social Welfare rate
22 €188, that figure should be €254. It hasn't been €188, if my calculations is right,
23 since 2016. That would leave a difference of €66 there. Perhaps that could be
24 checked.

25

26 The other question I would like to ask is: Why are some of our neighbouring
27 counties' rent cheaper than the rent that is being charged in Wicklow? And I got that
28 straight from the website. So if that could be looked at.

29

30 I welcome the fact that we're going to have walk-in clinics for people. I do agree
31 they should be in each municipal district but I would also like to give you a
32 breakdown of somebody that was in my office this week. Somebody who earns or
33 receives a payment of €225 a week, which is a total of €11,700. Their ESB per week
34 costs them €20, which is €1,040 per year. They buy 25 bags of coals, which costs

1 them €875. They buy three loads of softwood firewood, which is €180 a load. To be
2 fair, they get them for €160. And as anybody who sells firewood knows on a load
3 there's 14 barrellfuls, which doesn't go very far. Their rent has gone from €27 a week
4 to €44 a week. When you put those calculations together and you take it off of their
5 total income of €11,700 that leaves them €5,515. When you add in the fact that a fill
6 of oil. This person had their fill of oil calculated at €1,500. A fill of oil, a thousand
7 litres of oil at the moment, today if you were to order it, is €1,630. Which leaves
8 them €103 a week to live on. Now, this person tries to budget their house on €15 a
9 day. That leaves them short €2 a week. So in fact they would need €227 to break
10 even. They're only getting €225. So this family, this person is in dire hardship so
11 they are.

12

13 I don't agree with what Councillor Stapleton said earlier on, and I can't remember
14 everything he said but I don't know anybody in a Council house earning 200,000 a
15 year.

16

17 So in fairness I think I do feel for the elderly. I do think there's anomalies here.
18 And, Chief Executive, I understand there hasn't been a review for seven years, but I
19 think postponing it for one month is going to save somebody maybe €12 or €14. I
20 think it should be postponed until the new year until it is really looked at. Thank
21 you.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Is that everyone from the floor? Councillor
23 O'Toole.

24 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Sorry, so just to clarify that some of the stuff that has
25 been raised we're going to get answers now; is that correct?

26 MS O'GORMAN: Okay. Cathaoirleach, with your permission, I might get Brian
27 just to talk about the financials and where it sits in the budget and where any monies
28 go that are raised from rents, and then I will pass over to Caroline and to Michael to
29 answer the specific questions about the scheme.

30 MR GLEESON: Thank you, Chief Executive. In relation to the financial position, a
31 bit of background first. When the members adopted the 2026 budget back in
32 November 2025 they approved an income increase of 1.5 million. That was based
33 on additional units and the rent review, additional income coming through on that.
34 On that basis, that extra money was allocated out to the municipal districts for extra

1 funding for repairs and maintenance and pre-letting works across the county.
2 Basically, if the scheme was paused until the new year it would leave the housing
3 budget short by €1 million, and that would result in having to pause or cancel works
4 that were planned for Quarter 4 of this year. If it is just paused by a month to the 7th
5 of November, as proposed by the Chief Executive, we would have enough funding to
6 carry on with the planned repairs and maintenance works and pre-letting works that
7 were approved by the members in the budget. So I hope that clarifies that.

8
9 And in relation to any income next year, if the scheme goes ahead next year it would
10 be retained within the Housing Programme. If the scheme didn't go ahead at all, next
11 year we would actually be short funding and we would actually have to cut the
12 housing budget in November. I hope that clarifies the situation.

13
14 Just to mention about I think arrears was mentioned. Actually we have addressed the
15 arrears quite significantly over the last 18 months. As you are well aware, the Debt
16 Management Unit was set up by the Council in 2015. Since January 2025 our
17 arrears has gone by 1.2 million from 3.3 to just over 2.1 in August 2026. And this
18 year alone, based on face-to-face meetings, we have also actually agreed 181
19 payment plans with tenants. So there's a lot of progress being made in relation to
20 arrears. Thank you very much. If there's any other further clarifications I'm happy
21 to take them. Thank you.

22 MR NICHOLSON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. There weren't very many questions
23 asked by the members. Most of the contributions were just statements but I did take
24 note of a few questions. Just before I deal with the questions just a couple of general
25 comments.

26
27 There should be no need for any Local Authority to carry out a rent review.
28 Absolutely no need. Every Council tenant signed a tenancy agreement which is a
29 legal agreement which requires them to notify the Council of any change in
30 household income. If every tenant did that there would be no need for a rent review.
31 The reason we do a rent review is because most Council tenants don't inform us
32 when they have increase in the rent. They're very quick to inform us when their
33 income goes down but they never tell us when their income goes up. So we have to
34 do a rent review to make sure people are paying correct rent. This works the other

1 way. We can often discover, as we have in this case, a lot of people are paying too
2 high rent. Almost 600 tenants had a reduction in rent because their income had
3 changed adversely and they never told us. So that's why we do a rent review.

4

5 Some of the allegations like the Council have hiked up rents. We haven't hiked up
6 any rents. We don't hike up rents. We haven't got the power to hike up rents. Rents
7 are assessed entirely on household income. If your income goes up your rent goes
8 up. If your income goes down your rent goes down. Income stays the same, rents
9 stay the same. We don't hike up any rents, and some of the disgraceful comments on
10 Facebook, Council hiking up rents, petitions to stop hiking up rents. We hike up no
11 rents. I want to make that point absolutely clear. It is household income determines
12 rent payable. We don't determine it. The rent scheme doesn't lie.

13

14 Finally, allegations that this was sprung on tenants. We have been working on this
15 for two years. We have kept the members informed all the way along the line we
16 have done it on Facebook, all sorts of social media and we have kept the members
17 through the SPC as well updated. People sent back their forms a year ago. They
18 knew they were going to get a letter informing them of the new rents. It is no
19 surprise to anybody. It has taken us over a year because we had 7,500 rent
20 calculations to do. As Caroline said, it wasn't a nice job. When the forms came in
21 there was an awful lot of to-ing and fro-ing with people, checking figures, and going
22 back and clarifying any changes. If somebody sent in a rent form that changed from
23 the last time we had to go back and clarify that.

24

25 A lot of households have two or three incomes in the household. The
26 recommendation from the Department is we add all the incomes together and
27 calculate the rents. We don't do that here. If we were to do that rents would be
28 considerably higher. We take the main earner, based on the person whose tenancy is
29 legal, and then a contribution from each other earner. We don't add all the incomes
30 together. Some Local Authorities add all the incomes together and rents are
31 considerably higher.

32

33 Before we did the scheme we looked at rent schemes from practically every county
34 in the country to see how our scheme compared, and it compared extremely

1 favourably with other Local Authorities. Our rents are much lower. We particularly
2 looked at our neighbours in Wexford, South Dublin, Carlow and around us and the
3 rents were considerably higher than here. We haven't had a rent review since 2019.
4 And I agree with the comments the members make, we shouldn't leave it that long
5 but we had Covid and everything in between that and we assumed people were
6 notifying us of their increase but some of course obviously weren't.

7
8 Traditionally Council tenants were in receipt of low incomes and rents were low.
9 What has astonished us this time round is a number of Council tenants were earning
10 in excess of €100,000 per annum. We have a lot of tenants earning 75 grand, 80
11 grand, 100 grand. The example that Caroline gave was the highest rent in the
12 country, and that person is earning a gross of 220,000 per year. There's quite a lot of
13 people earning €100,000 who shouldn't be in Council houses truth be told. A lot of
14 people prefer to stay in a Council house even though they probably could afford a
15 mortgage, and in fact in some cases the mortgage would even be a bit less than the
16 rent, but that's the decision they make. We can't force someone to give up a Council
17 house. Some people do buy their house on the Tenant Purchase Scheme, and that is
18 an option too, but they have to have ten years before they can do that. So some
19 people are waiting for the ten years.

20
21 Despite our best efforts and despite writing out to tenants 606 people never sent back
22 the rent form. Some people make a decision not to send back a rent form because it
23 is actually in their interest, because we impose €50 per week penalty. In some cases
24 people have calculated if they send in their income it'll be higher than that. So some
25 people have made a conscious decision to accept the penalty rent which might seem
26 bizarre but that goes to give you an indication of what the rent they reckon would be
27 if they did send back the form. In fact one or two forms we checked and the tenants
28 were very honest and sent in their income. Some tenants if they hadn't sent in their
29 income would have been better off with the penalty rent, which again it is bizarre but
30 people make that decision.

31
32 So we do live in a changed environment where incomes of 100,000 are not unusual.
33 Quite a few people are on that. In order to qualify for a Council house you have to
34 be earning in a household less than €48,000 a year. It is astonishing to me how many

1 people are in a Council house for a couple of years and all of a sudden the household
2 income is €100,000. Astonishing. And we find that every time we do rent review;
3 we're amazed at the significant increase in a couple of years. We have people
4 applying to buy their house after two years tenancy and all of a sudden their income
5 is €200,000. So we haven't been told and we are not being told, so that is why we do
6 a rent review.

7
8 So we don't hike up rents. Rents are only going up when the person's income goes
9 up. I would hope this is the last time we have to do a rent review because there is a
10 system, and it was mentioned by one of the members, where Social Welfare would
11 be automatically linked in the Rent Scheme. When a person gets an increase in
12 Social Welfare their rent is automatically adjusted. I welcome that day. That system
13 is being worked on and tried. I hope it comes into Wicklow in a few years' time. I
14 time we don't have to do 7,500 rent calculations ever again. And hopefully we won't
15 have to do that. And again, if people told us what their income is every time it
16 changes we'd never have to do a rent review.

17
18 In regards to the questions from the floor. All income raised by the Council is spent
19 back on the Housing Programme. Last year in fact we spent €101,000. We slightly
20 spent over that. All the money goes back into houses. We need an awful lot more
21 money because as mentioned some of the houses are old. It is unfortunate that rent is
22 based entirely on income. Whether your house is 60-years-old or one-year-old the
23 rent is the same, but that is the system we live by. We also don't differentiate
24 between one-, two-, three- and four-bed houses, and again someone could argue
25 maybe should, but again, the national scheme states it is based entirely on income
26 irrespective of the size or age of the house.

27
28 Just a couple of specific queries that were raised. The 606, we will go back to all
29 those people and we will try, as we have been doing for the past few months, and get
30 details from them, but some may not send in details. We do take into account the
31 annual income of a person. So somebody who is not working for three or four
32 months that is taken into account because we look at the annual figure not
33 necessarily the weekly figure. Backdating. We made a decision as the Executive
34 here we wouldn't backdate any arrears. For example, there's one particular tenant, if

1 we backdated their rent to 2019 they'd owe us nearly 80 grand, even an increase of
2 €25 per week, as Caroline said for example, they'd owe us 7 or 8 grand. So that is a
3 significant change. We decided not to take in maintenance payments and Carer's
4 Allowance. That is not law yet. That is still going through. We have jumped the
5 gun and decided that because we're doing the rent review now we would exclude
6 those. Other Local Authorities haven't. We're the first Local Authority to exclude
7 maintenance and to exclude Carer's Allowance from it. So I think we have been very
8 fair with no backdating, excluding those payments. I don't think we could have been
9 fairer in the scheme. The scheme was passed by the SPC. It was brought to the full
10 Council. And it's a very, very, very fair scheme.

11

12 Certainly we'll have walk-in clinics. We will have one in each MD. If anybody
13 wants us to recalculate their rent we will do that. If anybody has any queries on rents
14 we'll do that. If anybody wants us to explain in more detail how to calculate it we'll
15 do that. Any question people want to ask us we'll answer. We are very confident we
16 have done the scheme correctly, we are very confident in our calculations are correct.
17 We have checked our calculations in all the queries we have had so far. We get a lot
18 of queries where people are saying my income hasn't gone up yet my rent has. Their
19 income has gone up. And we go back and tell them their income has gone up every
20 year for the past six years. That's the reason why rents went up.

21

22 As regards, Brian covered this, we chase up rent arrears rigorously. We got two
23 possessions for houses last month. We will soon be sending out the sheriff to
24 recover those houses. We do take arrears very seriously. We have over 20 cases in
25 court at the moment for people who haven't paid their rent. We don't punish those
26 people who pay rent. We pursue those who don't pay it.

27

28 We do accept that there are some houses that need work and the extra income we
29 take in -- we spent a lot of money this year, about 4 million this year alone on house
30 repairs. That's just every day repairs. We spent many, many millions on planned
31 repairs, windows and doors, et cetera, and we will do an awful lot more next year.
32 We are conscious that some houses, particularly the older stock, are not A-rated and
33 they need significant upgrading.

34

1 As regards, I mentioned the fact about the old houses versus new houses. Yeah, so
2 any additional income will be ring-fenced. I don't have a figure yet what the income
3 will be because we have to finish out the system and deal with the penalty rents and
4 then we will get a figure. And hopefully by the time you have your budget for this
5 year I will have an exact figure for what the additional income might be for next year
6 and what it might be spent on, but we do intend to do conditional surveys in all our
7 MDs next year and tackle the worst estate in each MD and tackle those in a
8 meaningful way.

9
10 I don't accept that neighbouring counties have lower rents. We checked all
11 neighbouring counties and we certainly found that our scheme is as good if not better
12 than most.

13
14 I don't think there's any other specific questions, Cathaoirleach. A lot were
15 statements, as I said, as opposed to questions. But we're happy to deal -- at the
16 drop-in clinics we'll deal with any questions. We'll have staff available in each of the
17 MDs. We will agree dates and send them out. We're not afraid of any question. We
18 deal with it as best we can. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

19 MS FOX: Sorry, Cathaoirleach, may I come in here? Just on the rent calculations
20 themselves, they were checked once and checked twice. They were rechecked. So a
21 separate member of the team would have checked them, just to say that on the
22 calculations. I think, Councillor Kennedy, you particularly mentioned a few samples
23 there but they could easily be a pensioner. You mentioned particularly a pensioner's
24 rate. Don't forget you have non-contributory and contributory pensions there. So
25 that's an important piece. The clinics, we'll get the dates and the information out as
26 quickly as possible to tenants. Again we will look at that across the five MDs. That
27 piece will have to be done. There was a reference there a couple of times to the rate
28 of €188. That rate was set at 2014, but that does not have to reflect the Department
29 of Social Welfare rate. We chose the €188 because it in comparison to other Local
30 Authorities was very similar and that's how we came up with that rate. So that's on
31 the actual scheme itself. Thank you.

32 MR NICHOLSON: Sorry, just one quick question. I neglected to mention and to
33 thank all the staff. I know the members don't want to hear this, they are more
34 interested on the affect it has on tenants, I accept that but at the same time a lot of my

1 time worked after hours this through over the last year. Also specifically Caroline
2 who has probably ate, drank and slept the Rent Scheme for the past couple of
3 months, I pay tribute to her as well. Thank you.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I will start to bring back the Elected Members.
5 Councillor O'Neill.

6 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just a quick one. As you know
7 it is quite difficult for worried tenants to get through on online here, calling the
8 Council. In the event of an appeal where it could go on and on maybe, I don't know
9 whether it would take a month or two or whatever, would arrears start kicking in at
10 the time that you suggest, say November, beginning of November and this appeal
11 hearing mightn't be heard until January or whatever, would that person go into
12 arrears from that date? Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

13 MS O'GORMAN: I just want to give a commitment that anybody that has a change
14 in their rent post 7th November, the effective date of the scheme, if their rent has
15 been overassessed and needs to come down that'll be backdated. So if there are
16 anything accumulated on it, if they should have been charged €50 and they're being
17 charged €75 and they provide the documentary evidence that'll be effective from the
18 7th November. So to make sure nobody is overcharged. It is not the intention of the
19 scheme. I want to give members that assurance on that.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stapleton.

21 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yeah, I was just going to come in to reference the
22 disregard that Councillor Alvey had brought up. I do acknowledge your response
23 there, Caroline, that if it was taken in the round of kind of the general rent setting,
24 but it probably is the one specific area where if it was increasing with inflation at the
25 very least then it is actually an effective increase than just on top of people's income
26 driving increase. Then just two small questions. In terms of the query I kind of
27 asked, would it be possible to set out the calculations for people's rents like in the
28 communication perhaps going forward just so they can clearly see where it comes
29 from? And then just a tiny point that I raised at the time that the Rent Scheme was
30 put in front of us as well, the way it is laid out, at the end it says multiplied by 3%. I
31 know a few people getting in touch with me is it was causing confusion, because I
32 presume the intention was add 3% at the end. That's only a tiny one.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Snell.

34 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I'll be brief. Just in regards to the

1 scheme as it's presented today. Unfortunately I believe that we're going to have to go
2 back to the drawing board in regards to this. I think we're basing it off the
3 €188 -- would have to be increased to reflect people's circumstances, current
4 circumstances in regards to their Social Welfare payments, their pension payments
5 and the like. And again, there's an awful lot of people out there who believe that,
6 particularly our tenants in the older Local Authority estates, are being harshly treated
7 because they're the ones that's had least amount of retrofit, energy upgrade works
8 within their housing stock.

9
10 Again if I can just bring the members' attention to this and also the senior
11 management. I was presented here today with a petition from residents, non-political
12 residents, who went around and there's over 800 signatures on this, from our largest
13 area of housing estate in Bray, County Wicklow. So it is Fassaroe, Old Court area.
14 Councillor Neary will be very familiar with that area. He represents the people there
15 excellently. But this petition here was handed to me outside by a couple of ladies
16 that went around. They've no political affiliation to anybody. They're just majorly
17 concerned. Then if we look at the likes of Farrankelly in Greystones, Hillview in
18 Wicklow Town, Glending in Blessington, Invermore Park in Arklow, there are older
19 estates with the historical issues with regards to poor building control. And my
20 question is, like, the retrofits and that cannot be purely left to money generated from
21 rents within the Local Authority. So I'd ask anyone with any political clout in
22 regards to Central Government funding to step forward and talk to their colleagues
23 within the Dáil to make sure that one can be forthcoming in regards to the retrofit
24 that's needed. Because as we all know on a yearly basis you're talking about a very
25 small number of houses that are retrofitted. They pick mainly two estates throughout
26 the whole county. We have five municipal districts, you could pick two in each
27 municipal district, some of these won't have the retrofit works. We're talking about
28 an A-rating, they won't achieve it. A lot of these houses were built in the seventies,
29 some in the sixties, some that were built in the eighties and nineties are of poorer
30 quality believe it or not.

31
32 That brings me to my next point, in regards to the Tenant Purchase Scheme. I think
33 we need to go back and have a look at the Tenant Purchase Scheme. For people to
34 wait ten years to put in to purchase their houses where there's actually people paying

1 higher rents on this scheme than it would to get a mortgage and buy out the house,
2 and we're telling them that you may stay there for another four years or another five
3 years or whatever the case may be. Effectively what's happening, you're creating
4 extra work on the staff in Housing which is very unfair because now they're dealing
5 with people who want transfers, and who can blame them? Who would want to stay
6 in an older house because it's costing them more money to heat it? They have to
7 effectively put more of their own money in, and it when it comes to repairs they're
8 having to do the repairs themselves because they're at the end of their tether ringing
9 to try and get sometimes repairs done let alone windows and doors, and they'll
10 always be referred to the tenants' handbook in regards they're your own
11 responsibility in regards the fixtures and fittings. I think we should review the
12 Tenant Purchase Scheme and allow people who want to buy their houses buy them
13 out.

14
15 That brings us to the next cohort of people, which is Approved Housing Bodies. A
16 lot of people that's gone into the Approved Housing Bodies they get their review
17 every year. They can never buy out those houses. So while some people are happy
18 to move on but they need to be aware that they never buy out their houses. I think
19 there is an onus and an obligation that a Local Authority should be treated the same
20 as the private sector where our property should be inspected on a yearly basis and
21 brought up to a certain standard, and if that makes compiling the data to send to
22 Central Government -- because they stand up on a parapet and shouting they're
23 giving us funding and we know we're not getting half enough. So I don't want it to
24 fall back on the rents. There should be central funding. I call on my colleagues who
25 have people within Government and opposition to do their part as well.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Murphy online.

27 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And Councillor Snell
28 unfortunately covered some of the issues I was going to raise. I actually live in
29 Invermore Park estate here for many years. I wouldn't move out of it. But there is a
30 lot of old stock here, and I know that some people have been waiting for a lot of
31 refitting. And my question is: In each district do we know how many houses are not
32 A-rated? And if we are going to use the revenue of rent over the next while to
33 improve our housing stock will you have contractors, will you have contractors
34 seeking you know the tenders for it? Because I think that's going to be difficult. I

1 know I'm in a house here that there's gaps in the window and the double glaze is over
2 25 years, and it is well over 25 years. I was talking to somebody yesterday and they
3 went to buy a bag of coal and it was €47.50. That is just a bag of coal. As
4 Councillor Kennedy said, the leap in oil is over a thousand euro. That is in three
5 weeks. So if I buy 500 litres of oil, two weeks ago it was €820. And I think coming
6 up to Christmas it is very unfair, and I would like it to be deferred until the new year.
7 But I would like to know also the issue of people applying for -- instead of waiting
8 for refits and saying I will apply for maybe the improvement scheme on the housing,
9 either a Disability Grant for the Old Persons Grant, then that money may have ran
10 out because there's not enough money covering those grants. So they're still waiting
11 on improvements of either grants or Council repairs, and it is not happening. Thank
12 you.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor O'Toole.

14 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just one of the things that I
15 brought up there earlier on that we didn't get an answer for. Can you provide us with
16 a breakdown of the households that are facing an increase of 0-10%, 10-20%,
17 20-30%, 30-50% and 50-100%? Because if you can't provide us with these can we
18 ask was an Equality Poverty and Affordability Household Impact Assessment carried
19 out? And if there wasn't, why not?

20

21 Also it's been mentioned loads of times the reference to higher thresholds and
22 everything. I haven't came across any of these people. The people that I have been
23 talking to are people that are struggling, concerned, that they have the prospect of
24 facing a hardship in winter. This is compounded by the likes of these rent increases.
25 It's also mentioned a lot that, mentioned about gross, can we just get clarification:
26 Are the calculations being done on gross or net in regards to these?

27

28 With reference to calling these rent hikes, like these are likes on people, on
29 individuals, that's simply what they are. People seem to be penalised for the Council
30 not acting over the last number of years for gradually implementing these increases.
31 So these tenants are being held to ransom by the Council now for their failings on
32 this matter. Can we just get clarification as well, there's a lot of percentages and a lot
33 of figures being put out here, is 87% of the tenants getting a rent increase? We're
34 talking about decreases and all this sort of stuff, but can we get a figure of how many

1 tenants are actually getting an increase?

2

3 I'd also request that can we present this petition that came from the tenants across the
4 county to the senior management?

5

6 And just one last thing to clarify, and it kind of brings up something that a lot of
7 people are talking about also. I sent Councillor Winstanley an email through my
8 official County Council email address on Friday, the previous Friday. I have proof
9 of that. Councillor Winstanley didn't receive that on the Friday. And I think this
10 kind of echoes what people are saying, that things are being sent into Wicklow
11 County Council and it doesn't seem to be being where it is supposed to be going.
12 Members have highlighted this in this chamber umpteen times with the IT issues. I
13 would like to highlight that also. If I can take this opportunity to present this
14 petition. Thank you.

15 MR NICHOLSON: Just a few extra questions came up there I'd like to answer. Is
16 that all right?

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

18 MR NICHOLSON: As was explained earlier, we take net income not gross income,
19 which again is another thing we do which favours tenants. Because if we took gross
20 income rents would be considerably hire. As regards improvement works, it is
21 important to remember that we do get significant funding directly out of the
22 Department outside of rental income, and this allows us to do the more substantial
23 capital works. So the rental income is generally used for ongoing maintenance and
24 some smaller items, but we do get significant money from the Department for
25 retrofitting, energy efficiency, et cetera, and we have got many millions every year.
26 And we have done a lot of houses this year, retrofitting and energy improvements.
27 We haven't had a problem yet getting contractors. We use framework agreements.
28 So at the start of the year we have a list of all contractors on a framework agreement
29 and we generally have no problem getting funding. The money for housing grants
30 didn't run out. We simply have far too many applications to cope. And obviously
31 when you have a huge amount of applications and a certain allocation a time will
32 come when all the allocation has been used up by people applying for grants. But
33 the grant will be open again on the 1st January and no doubt we will get loads of
34 applications again in January.

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We can provide any figures you like in terms of percentages. Even though we're not the Public Accounts Committee we will provide any figure that any member wants in relation to percentages.

As regards tenants purchase, the reason why people have to wait ten years is because they get significant discounts. They could get 60% discount off the price of their house by waiting ten years. If you think about this logically, if a person is earning less than €45,000 to qualify for a Council house how are they in a position after a year to buy their house? I'll leave that one hanging there.

So we'll provide any figures you like. We'll provide percentage figures you like. We will recalculate all rents. People coming to us with difficulties with their income we can tell them very quickly what their rent is by using the calculation. Certainly if anyone wants to hand me a petition we'll take it now.

MS O'GORMAN: It was mentioned as well about an online calculator. We're looking at that to have some sort of tool available for individuals so they can figure out about what making a decision on income will have on their rent. So we're looking at that tool as well.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Richmond.

COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and I will be brief. Just the online calculation. I think that clarity if people could see it clearly it would make things a lot easier, and there is that transparency. One thing in relation to upgrading of particularly older stock, and particularly the retrofitting, I do know there's houses in the 1930s, '40s, '50s that are yet to be retrofitted. So I think that priority listing -- Like, there's so much impact, and we're talking about the cost of fuel and oil and the heating, and I think by prioritising those particular houses you're going to reduce the impact of any differential rent. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Ward.

COUNCILLOR WARD: Yeah, sorry. Just the senior management there, they're implying that if these rent increases don't go through that they may not have the funds to do all the work next year that's proposed for people's repairs, but you're sitting up there saying the exact same thing as people are saying to us. If these rent increases do go through they'll won't have the funds, they'll have to re-budget, they

1 will have to find money somewhere to pay these increases, which your own figures
2 say that nearly 1,600 people have been affected by a €50-€ 200 per week increase.
3 Now, in a cost of living crisis they just can't find that money. So you're up there
4 telling us that you have to budget if you don't get these funds but the people on the
5 doors are telling us that they will have to re-budget, they will have to give up on
6 heating or food or whatever to get their budgets. So you're kind of saying to us one
7 thing and doing the other.

8
9 The people on the streets, as I said, who have been in touch with us a lot of them
10 physically can't pay this. We've all had loads of different examples. We've
11 pensioners, their money is going, their rent is going up by 50% to 100%. A
12 pensioner just can't find that money. So, as I said, if this isn't stopped there's going
13 to be seriously people in very difficult circumstances, they're going to be in arrears
14 and some people are afraid they're going to get evicted. That's what we need to back
15 to. It's okay talking figures, but these are real people. They come to us, reaching out
16 to us to help them out. We can all quote figures, we've all listened to stories, some
17 parties aren't get as many queries as ourselves, but at the end of the day they just
18 can't pay it and that's what this is all brought down to. It's about, as you say, budget
19 and funding. If they don't have the money to go out and get an extra €200 what's
20 going to happen to them? As I said, we got loads of pensioners on to us, we've a list
21 here full of names, including pensioners, they just can't find €100 extra a month. It's
22 just crazy. Thank you.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Snell.

24 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just seeking permission to hand in
25 this 800 signatures non-political petition to the Chief Executive of Wicklow County
26 Council. And just so everyone is aware, the residents what they're asking is:
27 "Wicklow County Council, relevant decision-makers, to consider the concerns raised
28 by residents regarding the 2026 Differential Rent Scheme and its impact on
29 household affordability." It is quite a simple petition, and I think it's asking for the
30 goodwill of the senior officials. Thank you.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. And I am just going to pass to Helen who is
32 going to clarify the section 140.

33 MS PURCELL: Just in relation to the section 140 there's been some discussion in
34 relation to it, and just the members will be aware that the legislation requires that:

1 "Notice of the intention to propose the resolution under this section shall be given in
2 writing to the Chief Executive and the notice shall be signed by at least two members
3 and shall contain the text of the proposed resolution." And then there are a number
4 of different paragraphs in relation to the timing of the meeting depending on when
5 the section 140 is received. Thank you. Just to make it clear: If section 140 is
6 handed into the Chief Executive today it can be held, it can be heard as the first thing
7 on the agenda for the ordinary meeting next Monday.

8 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: That was the intention.

9 MS PURCELL: Yeah, thanks.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Brien.

11 COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Cathaoirleach, we also have
12 a responsibility to the integrity of this chamber, and it's probably something that
13 should have been brought up earlier today and forgive me if I didn't do it. When
14 we're dealing with Local Area Plans, County Development Plans, when we're
15 dealing with disposal notices, there's always a thing - conflict of interest, if you're
16 going to benefit from that decision. So I'm not casting aspersions and everyone who
17 has spoke here today is speaking from an honourable position but we also have to
18 recognise that there is integrity here and we have to protect the integrity of this
19 chamber, so if there's a conflict of interest that people can benefit from what they are
20 doing here today I think it needs to be said. Again I am not casting aspersions, they
21 are doing it an honourable way but to protect the integrity of this chamber it is
22 important that we do so because at the end of the day we need clean hands on this.
23 People need to be paying their rent and arrears, if they're in arrears, people need to be
24 declaring their income, so they do. So if there is a conflict of interest I think it needs
25 to be declared because I have sat in this chamber nearly for seven and a half years
26 and I have seen councillors getting up and walking out and saying sorry, I can
27 benefit from that decision, I need to walk out and that's because they have integrity.
28 I think it is something that needs to be clarified here today. If there is a conflict of
29 interest and people benefit from this decision all they have to do is declare the
30 conflict of interest, and they can share their concerns as well. But again look it, it
31 might sound petty but it is to protect the integrity of this chamber. Thank you.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor O'Brien. Councillor Ward.

33 COUNCILLOR WARD: I actually live in a Council house, does that mean I have to
34 step away? I have no problem people knowing I am affected, I live in a Council

1 house.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Perfect. Councillor Fenelon Gaskin.

3 COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Yeah, thank you, Cathaoirleach, and again
4 thank you, Caroline, and the team for everything that you have done. And I do
5 welcome the clinics and that. Unfortunately I am just coming on to say that I
6 actually have to leave because I interview for teacher positions which is also
7 important but I am sorry that I have to leave, and I just do want to say that I've had
8 people come on to me as well. I haven't had that many but I have had people come
9 on to me, and the one thing I do think is the short time of it is not giving people
10 enough time to work out things for themselves and I do think if we could stretch it
11 out it would be much better and give people, I don't know, a couple of months
12 anyhow to work out whatever with their budgets or whatever or anything we can do
13 to help them. But that's just my position. But unfortunately I do have to leave. So
14 thank you.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Councillor Glennon.

16 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Unfortunately I also have to leave. I have a hospital
17 appointment. I got my hip done six weeks ago and I have to go back in today to
18 St Vincent's Hospital today. I have expressed my views on it and looking for the
19 Chief Executive just to assure us that anyone with an issue with the rent will have it
20 fully determined before the increase takes place. Thank you.

21 MS O'GORMAN: To confirm, any tenant who has an issue with their rent will have
22 it reassessed and the appropriate rent applied. I can't guarantee it will happen by the
23 7th of November but any effective date. So if the rent should go down it'll be
24 backdated to the 7th of November. So it will have no impact on the individual.
25 They won't --

26 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: I understand. Thank you.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Does anyone else want to come in before we finish?
28 Okay. The meeting is closed. Thank you.

29

30 (Meeting concluded at 12:30 pm.)

31

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