

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

ON MONDAY, 1 DECEMBER 2025 AT 2:00PM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 1ST DECEMBER 2025 AT
2:00PM, AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon, Members. Thank you for all your attendance. I welcome you all; staff, the directors, press in the gallery, members of the public in the gallery. You're all very welcome. I am going to go to Helen first to read out the etiquette and the roll call.

MS PURCELL: Good afternoon, everybody and welcome to the meeting. Welcome to the members of the public who are present in the chamber and also online to the meeting. If I could just remind the Elected Members online to leave their cameras on and their microphones off until they wish to speak. Everybody else please leave their cameras off and their microphones off. I would like to remind all present they are bound by the Codes of Conduct for Councillors and Employees. And if there are any technical issues please contact me. I will now proceed with the rollcall. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Mark Barry?

COUNCILLOR BARRY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Malachai Duddy?

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present. (Applause.)

MS PURCELL: Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Present.

- 1 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Orla Finn?
- 2 COUNCILLOR FINN: Present.
- 3 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?
- 4 COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.
- 5 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Tom Fortune?
- 6 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.
- 7 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
- 8 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.
- 9 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
- 10 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.
- 11 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Shane Langrell?
- 12 COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Present.
- 13 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?
- 14 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present.
- 15 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Mahon?
- 16 COUNCILLOR MAHON: Present.
- 17 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
- 18 COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Present.
- 19 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Miriam Murphy? Councillor Ian Neary?
- 20 COUNCILLOR NEARY: Present.
- 21 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?
- 22 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Anseo.
- 23 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
- 24 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Present.
- 25 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Councillor Warren O'Toole?
- 26 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Present.
- 27 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Graham Richmond?
- 28 COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Present.
- 29 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Lourda Scott?
- 30 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Here.
- 31 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor John Snell?
- 32 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.
- 33 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
- 34 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Present.

1 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes?

2 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.

3 MS PURCELL: Perfect. Councillor Ned Whelan?

4 COUNCILLOR WHELAN: Present.

5 MS PURCELL: Present. And Councillor Caroline Winstanley?

6 COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Present.

7 MS PURCELL: Present. Thank you.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Do we have any expressions of sympathy?

9 Councillor Orla Finn.

10 COUNCILLOR FINN: Thank you very much. Yes, I would like to extend my
11 sympathy and the sympathy of my fellow Councillors on the Greystones Municipal
12 District to Laurie Kiernan on the passing of her mum. Laurie is a member of the
13 staff in Greystones Municipal District. I would also like then to extend our
14 sympathy to Stephen Kiernan who as you all know is always at the count centre in a
15 capacity there. So thank you very much.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Gail Dunne.

17 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'd like to express a vote of
18 sympathy for Paddy O'Brien who would be Paul O'Brien's uncle, who died recently
19 in Wicklow Town, and to Stephen Kiernan on the loss of his father. Thank you.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Stephen Stokes.

21 COUNCILLOR STOKES: I would just like to share the sentiments in relation to
22 Paddy O'Brien, you know his son David and daughter Melanie, and also to
23 Councillor Paul O'Brien, his nephew.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Silvester Bourke.

25 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like to be associated
26 with those condolences to Stephen Kiernan on the death of his father and to Laurie
27 his wife who lost her mother as well. Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Have we any staff condolences?

29 MS PURCELL: We extend our sympathies to the families of Marie Byrne, sister of
30 our friend and colleague Michael Byrne, and Ann Lawlor, sister of our friend and
31 colleague John Merrigan.

32

33 (Moment of silence.)

34

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

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: I would like to bring Councillor Pat Kennedy in.

4 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would just like to
5 welcome my colleague, and I know surely I speak, and you might say a few words in
6 a minute on behalf of the management, yourself or the Chief Executive. I would like
7 to welcome our colleague Gail Dunne back to the chamber today. As we all know
8 Gail has had a tough year and a half and it is great to see him here in the chamber,
9 but he always logged on online. So Gail's interest and his commitment to the people
10 of the Municipal District of Wicklow is unquestionable. Gail, we're all delighted to
11 see you back here today. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: I think, yeah, you speak on behalf of us all. It is great to see
13 you back, Gail. We have definitely missed your presence in the chamber. So just go
14 easy on us now today. It's been a long time, it's wonderful to see you. Thank you.

15 MS O'GORMAN: And again, just on behalf of all the Management Team we're
16 delighted to see you, Gail. I know you did fully participate online but it is not the
17 same as having you in the room, so we're delighted to see you here today and wish
18 you well on your continued recovery. Thank you.

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. So we'll move onto the first item on the agenda,
20 which is: "To confirm and sign minutes of ordinary meeting of Wicklow County
21 Council held on Monday, 3rd November 2025." Can I have a proposer and a
22 seconder, please? Proposed by Avril Cronin and seconded by Paul O'Brien. Any
23 matters arising out of the minutes anyone wanted to raise? No. Okay.

24

25 We will go on to the second item, which is: "To consider the disposal of 0.0157
26 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Oldcourt Td being the property known as
27 23 Wolfe Tone Square South to Susan Byrne as legal personal representative in the
28 estate of Kathleen O'Rourke deceased." Can I have a proposer and a seconder?
29 Councillor Dermot O'Brien and seconded by Councillor Ned Whelan. All agreed?
30 (Agreed.) Great.

31

32 Next I would actually like to bring forward the presentation from the AILG as we
33 only have the one presentation, we have the second one, so if I have an agreement on
34 that. So Councillor Gail Dunne.

1 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, I'd like to propose that
2 we bring that forward on the agenda because people here from the AILG have
3 travelled far and near but it'd be nice to get them moved on, and hopefully it's a very
4 interesting presentation. So I propose it.

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: Great. Thank you. Do we have a seconder? Councillor Pat
6 Kennedy. I would like to welcome then -- all agreed? (Agreed.) All agreed. Thank
7 you. I would like to welcome then Elaine Murphy from AILG to make the
8 presentation and also to welcome Councillor Paddy O'Rourke, the Vice President as
9 well from AILG. You're both very welcome.

10 COUNCILLOR O'ROURKE: Good afternoon everybody and thank you,
11 Cathaoirleach and to the Elected Members, for the warm welcome we received since
12 arriving here. And let me begin by acknowledging the vital role that each and every
13 one of you play as elected representatives. As Councillors, you're on the frontline of
14 democracy, serving your communities, making tough decisions, and increasingly
15 being asked to lead through more change, complexity and scrutiny than ever before.
16 That's why we're here. That is the AILG. The Association of Irish Local
17 Government exists to represent, support and empower the 950 Elected Members
18 across the country. We are evolving to meet the growing demands of your role, and
19 this engagement roadshow is a key part of that evolution.

20

21 Over the past number of years AILG has achieved a great deal, from securing better
22 conditions and pay supports for Councillors to providing high quality training and
23 advocating nationally and internationally on your behalf, but we know there is much
24 more to do. The purpose of today's presentation is to highlight the work we're doing
25 on your behalf, strengthen our connection with you as Members, and, most
26 importantly, to listen to whatever concerns or views you might have. This is your
27 association. It is shaped by Members for Members. We want to ensure that you are
28 getting the most for your membership, whether that is through training, policy,
29 advocacy or supporting you in your day-to-day role.

30

31 We'd like to thank you again on behalf of the AILG. Elaine Lynch will deliver the
32 roadshow programme, so to speak, and it will be an opportunity to engage with her
33 in relation to concerns you might have.

34

1 If I might say on my own behalf, I am Councillor Paddy O'Rourke, I have been a
2 Councillor in South Leitrim for the last 21 years. And we have a slight connection
3 with County Wicklow insofar as ye somehow managed to poach not alone a good
4 County Manager from us in Frank Curran back a number of years but you also took
5 one of our best engineers Michael Flynn who I am sure you are all familiar with.
6 And we were sorry to see them go, but that's how the thing moves on. They seem to
7 be very much attracted to the Garden County, and I suppose when one drives around
8 it, it is easy to see why they were.

9
10 So thanks again for the invite and the welcome, and Elaine will take over from here.
11 Thank you. (Applause.)

12 MS LYNCH: Good afternoon everybody and thank you to our Vice President and
13 again thank you to the Cathaoirleach and the Elected Members and the Chief
14 Executive and Management Team for having us here today.

15
16 I suppose AILG, we're here as part of our efforts to build a stronger, more
17 collaborative relationship with our membership, which is the 950 Elected Members
18 across the country. We have been on the communications roadshow for a couple of
19 weeks now and it's been a brilliant opportunity to engage with our Members, to hear
20 some feedback, because I suppose we are a Member-led organisation so we want to
21 ensure that the Association reflects your voice, and it's only as strong and effective as
22 the input from Councillors across the country. So I suppose that's the reason why
23 we're here.

24
25 We'll move onto the next slide then. This is just to give you a very quick overview
26 in terms of what we do. So obviously we're a national voice for the 950 Elected
27 Members across the country. We're here to strengthen and promote local democracy
28 in Ireland but I suppose more importantly we're here to help Councillors meet the
29 challenges of Local Government through our advocacy, our policy influence and
30 practical supports like training and development, which I will touch on in a little bit,
31 and we continue to shape the National Policy in terms of Councillor conditions,
32 Local Government reform and education, but I suppose the ultimate goal for us is to
33 ensure that Councillors have the authority, they have the resources and they have the
34 respect that they need to perform their roles effectively.

1
2 I just want to on the next slide then do a quick overview for some Members in the
3 room that mightn't be aware of our organisational structure. So you will see here on
4 the screen, we are a Member-led organisation as I said, and in terms of how we're
5 funded we receive a small annual subscription from each of the 31 Local Authorities,
6 which isn't mandatory, it is voluntary, to point out, and that helps us fund our
7 National Training Programme, our policy and research initiatives, but it also means
8 that every Councillor automatically becomes a member of the AILG. You will see
9 on the screen our structure. You have our AILG Officer Board and Executive
10 Committee, which is a ten-member Executive Committee, and actually one of our
11 delegates here, Councillor Pat Kennedy, is sitting our Executive Committee this year
12 which we are delighted with, and our Plenary Delegate Body. Our Plenary Delegate
13 Body is very, very important. It is three Councillors from each of the 31 Local
14 Authorities, and they I suppose are a key driver for our policy initiatives, policy
15 development and discussion. That runs, has multiple meetings every year but that is
16 a key forum for I suppose your engagement with the Association. Your three
17 delegates, I'm delighted they're here in the room, we have Councillor Joe Behan,
18 Councillor Pat Kennedy and Councillor Avril Cronin. And they I suppose act as a
19 driver for feeding in input from Wicklow County Council back into the Association
20 and again bringing national issues to us that we can then drive on as an association.
21 And just to say as well, it's also important to highlight that we do have an Audit
22 Committee which has an independent chair, and we also have a Finance Committee,
23 and we are audited by the Local Government Audit Service on an annual basis as
24 well.

25
26 So onto my next slide, in terms of Member benefits. I suppose the reason why we're
27 here, it's not to get a pat on the back but I think it is important to highlight what
28 AILG has been doing on behalf of Councillors across the country. And I suppose the
29 easiest way I can put it is as elected representatives your job is to advocate for your
30 local communities but our job as an association is to advocate for you, for Elected
31 Members. And that of course is leading to a national voice on behalf of Councillors
32 where we have influence at national level, not just at national level, at EU level as
33 well. It is also about bringing tangible results. You will see there on the screen,
34 since our lobbying efforts the national salary for a Councillor has increased by 40%.

1 So we're now at approximately €32,000. In addition to that you also have non-pay
2 supports. We would have been crucial in terms of bringing the maternity/paternity
3 adoptive leave in for Elected Members as well, and improved working conditions.
4 And just to say that is something that the Association will always work on, on your
5 behalf because I think it is important that any of those issues don't become a barrier
6 for anybody else putting themselves forward, but also it is an extremely busy and
7 difficult role and it should be compensated accordingly.

8
9 Then moving on to tailored development and focused development. Obviously we
10 have been really, really proud of our development and training programme. That is
11 about strengthening you skills as Elected Members, ensuring Councillors are
12 empowered and informed in carrying out their role as public representatives. And I
13 will touch on some of our third level opportunities that we have actually introduced
14 such as our Micro-credential in Spatial Planning with Maynooth University. But
15 again, our role is to bring those training and educational opportunities to Councillors,
16 because I think it is such a varied role, there is a huge responsibility across multiple
17 areas of different policies so it is important that as Councillors you're kept up to date
18 and informed, and we would encourage Elected Members to try and avail of your
19 training allowance within your Local Authority because that's extremely important to
20 your development as well as a public representative.

21
22 And then if I move on to the next slide then, in terms of again areas where we've
23 delivered, you can see there that we've the increased terms and conditions. The
24 paternity/maternity leave I have touched on. We have also introduced a counselling
25 and welfare supports services for Councillors via your Local Authority. We have
26 done a huge amount of work on security and the abuse and harassment of
27 Councillors, which is absolutely disgraceful. And we have been quite vocal on that
28 over the past number of years and we done a huge amount of surveying and research
29 of our Members. We have introduced a 365 Security Assist Support that is available
30 now if Members wish to do so. And we were quite proud to bring in that security
31 allowance and again as of last year to get that increased. Again this is about
32 protecting our Elected Members and making sure that you feel safe in carrying out
33 your role as a public representative.

34

1 We have done a huge amount of work with the Women's Regional Caucus Network.
2 We had a very successful pilot. Again that is about increasing diversity and
3 participation. It is a hugely important part of what we do as an association and we
4 were delighted that the Government actually did agree in the Programme for
5 Government to support that rollout nationwide. So that is going to take place from
6 2026 onwards. We have a huge amount of cross-border collaboration work that the
7 Association does with our counterparts in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland
8 Local Government Association. And again, that's a really, really important part of
9 our work that we do. And we also are working to expand that to go east and west
10 with other representative bodies in Wales and in Scotland as well.

11
12 Then I am going to move on to the next slide then to touch on some of those policy
13 wins and our policy impact at national and EU level. I suppose people are aware that
14 the Local Democracy Task Force is ongoing at the moment, and if I can just take a
15 moment, I know Councillor Gail Dunne who was the former President of the AILG
16 in 2023-2024, but I suppose Gail would have done a huge amount of work during his
17 term as President for the Association in driving our ambition to try and get that
18 conversation going about Local Government reform here in Ireland, and we would
19 have had a huge amount of consultation with the Monitoring Committee from the
20 Council of Europe when they came over to Ireland to review our local democracy
21 structure here. And again, during Gail's term we would have actually launched our
22 Maynooth Research Report which was an independently commissioned research
23 report undertaken by Maynooth University, and that has had a huge impact in terms
24 of that conversation around Local Government reform, and I think the fact that two
25 out of the four pieces of research and reports that have been reviewed by the Local
26 Democracy Task Force the fact that they're AILG reports really speaks to the work
27 that we are doing on behalf of Elected Members as well.

28
29 And then just to move on to the next slide then, just to again focus on that Local
30 Democracy Task Force. I suppose that strategic advocacy that we have done,
31 investing in that research, investing in that policy work has materialised into what we
32 are delighted to see, the Local Democracy Task Force. Again, about empowering
33 Elected Members. Very important for us to have a look at reforming the Local
34 Government structure here which is, as I said, ongoing. We have ensured that there

1 is a very strong Councillor representation on that task force. We have five
2 Councillor seat secured. And that's ensuring that Elected Members' voices are again
3 central to that conversation. And again, as we touched on, our policy and research
4 will be directly informing the task force deliberations as well.

5
6 Just coming to the end of the presentation. If I can just move onto the next slide
7 then, on training and education. I have touched on this, and I suppose the
8 importance of professional training and development for Elected Members. We have
9 had a partnership with University College Cork for the past three years and that was
10 the first Level 7 course we introduced in the whole of Ireland, and that was an
11 opportunity for Level 7 accreditation for Climate Crisis in Local Government.
12 Obviously with climate action that has been introduced to Local Government and to
13 Local Authorities. There's a huge amount of responsibility there, so we just wanted
14 to make sure that Councillors felt supported and educated and informed when they're
15 making those decisions. And again, just as of two weeks ago we were really proud
16 to launch our micro credential with Maynooth University, and then that again is about
17 everyone in this room knows the planning landscape has changed dramatically over
18 the past 12 to 18 months. As Councillors there's a huge responsibility on you, so
19 again it was about introducing a practical Level 8 course that ensured that
20 Councillors felt confident carrying out those decisions you make on behalf of your
21 communities.

22
23 And again, we have done a huge amount of work in terms of, we have done a
24 strategic training needs analysis with our Members. We got over 400 responses to
25 that. So again, I suppose the purpose of today is to encourage you as Members to try
26 and engage with any of the surveys that we bring out because again it is about
27 collecting the voice and the thoughts of Elected Members that we can bring to
28 Government at a national level, and that can feed into when we're looking at a
29 training programme we know exactly what the Councillors want to see going
30 forward.

31
32 Moving on then to the final few slides just to then talk about the future for the
33 Association. And I suppose we are a small staff complement. So there's myself,
34 there's the Executive Director Tommy Moylan, we've only recently hired a new

1 office and accounts administrator which starts in the new year. So hopefully you can
2 see from the output of the Association it's been done with quite a small staff
3 complement but we do have plans to increase that over this council term. So you
4 will see a lot of growth from the Association going forward in terms of our capacity,
5 staff complement. Again that feeds into doing that in a sustainable way. We are
6 hoping one of the recommendations to maybe emerge from the task force would be
7 enhanced supports from the Government in terms of helping us enhance our service
8 delivery to the Elected Members, and again that comes into things like having a
9 dedicated training and research officer, being able to have something similar to the
10 Oireachtas Library Support and Research Service, that we can again bring that in for
11 Elected Members, because I think that's hugely important for you. And then just
12 finally to say with increased staff complement, with a policy and development
13 officer, all those different positions, that will help us again deepen our national
14 influence on behalf of Elected Members, and again just making sure that the
15 Councillor voice is at the decision-making table when those important decisions are
16 being made.

17
18 Just finally then onto the final slide which brings me to why we're here. Again it's
19 just to say your role in a stronger AILG is critical. Your engagement, it strengthens
20 the impact of what we do. So we do encourage Members as much as possible to
21 attend our training and development events both in person and online. We have
22 online training webinars. Please help shape our policy. We want to hear from our
23 Elected Members as much as possible, and that can be done through either your
24 plenary delegates or directly to the Association. You can pick up the phone at any
25 point. Again please contribute to our Member consultations and surveys. Stay
26 informed. We have a weekly bulletin that is delivered every Friday afternoon to
27 keep Members up to date on all the work of the Association. Just to say that your
28 input matters. Please talk to us. And again, it is about raising issues that you want
29 us to review, what supports will make the biggest impact in your role. These are all
30 the things that we wanted to hear from elected. And again, it's vital that we get
31 engagement from every Local Authority because each Local Authority is different as
32 well.

33
34 So that's it. Just on to the final slide, it's just to say we'd love to hear from you.

1 Thank you very much again for the opportunity, and just to say we're only as strong
2 as our Members' engagement. So this is your association, your voice, and please do
3 engage. Thank you. (Applause.)

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Elaine, and to you, Paddy. Thank you both for
5 travelling here today. We do appreciate all the work and the support that you give us
6 and work on our behalf. I am going to open it up to the Members now. Councillor
7 Pat Kennedy.

8 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to Paddy
9 O'Rourke, the Vice President of the AILG, and Elaine Lynch, who is Head of
10 Operations. Thank you both for being here today. I suppose as someone who sits on
11 the executive of the AILG for this year I also want to acknowledge my other
12 Councillor colleagues from this county who sit on this, Councillor Joe Behan and
13 Councillor Avril Cronin, for the work and commitment they give to it, not just when
14 they attend meetings but outside of meetings as well. They're always on the phone
15 for practical support as well. Elaine, I want to thank you and all the team in AILG
16 for everything you do for Councillors, in giving Councillors a voice, from the
17 training, policy development and right down to practical support when we need it, if
18 we phone you it's there for us. I suppose you did say something there about giving
19 Councillors a stronger voice at national level, and I think that's very important.
20 Because if Councillors have a stronger voice at national level that gives the
21 communities that we represent a stronger voice. Again I want to thank you for all
22 the work ye have done and the work ye continue to do, and I would encourage all of
23 our Members here in this county and in other counties to engage with AILG because
24 the benefits that they will get from being part of it and engaging with the AILG far
25 outweigh not being there. I can assure you of that, because I have learned a lot from
26 being there. I also want to acknowledge and thank former President Gail Dunne for
27 the work he did in 2023 and 2024. Thank you, Elaine. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Gail Dunne.

29 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thanks Paddy and Elaine
30 for the presentation. I suppose when I became President of the AILG we had a
31 (inaudible) agreement, nobody was more surprised than I was. But what I learned in
32 a year was unbelievable. The amount of meetings we had. And the one thing I
33 would say about the AILG, all the work they do is on our behalf. Everything they
34 do, they're trying to help the Councillors, whether it is wages, you know the security

1 allowance was a good thing that came in. In fairness, like the Women's Caucus,
2 Elaine was very much involved in. We were up in the Customs House one day doing
3 that. Like, we're trying to encourage more women to get involved in politics. And
4 we done the survey then about people being harassed in politics, and to be fair, we
5 sent out a questionnaire, and I think it was 68 -- or Elaine will probably know better,
6 but 68% of the people, of the Councillors within the country who responded had
7 been harassed, which is an awful thing. I was on the radio talking about it and I don't
8 think they believed us, but unfortunately that's the age we live in. And we're trying
9 to encourage young people, women, to get involved in politics, to bring it to a new
10 level, and it's really important that they do, but some of the stuff that's going around
11 wouldn't encourage them to be fair. So I would encourage people to get involved
12 because these are the people we need. Fresh ideas. Pat mentioned the fact that going
13 to training days and conferences and things like that. For the year I was there I went
14 to most of them obviously, but the amount of things that you pick up at these
15 conferences is unbelievable. Even talking to other Councillors, you're there chatting
16 away and next minute someone is doing something in Leitrim that we never thought
17 of in Wicklow and you bring that back and it's a great idea. You know, it's a learning
18 curve by going to the conferences, and I'd really encourage people -- I know, I'd say
19 if we asked how many, the percentage of people who go to conference not just in
20 Wicklow, throughout Dublin is another one, like they're missing out because the
21 amount of things that you learn is unbelievable, and it's well worth going. I can only
22 encourage you to go.

23
24 There's a big change in the AILG at the moment. Obviously Liam has retired now.
25 Liam was there for a long number of years. And Tommy has took over and Elaine
26 has moved up as well. I would like to wish yous the very best in your new roles. I
27 have no doubt that the Association is in good hands and will strive to keep
28 continuing all of the good work that you have carried out over the last number of
29 years. When you're going and you're dealing with Ministers. The hardest thing I had
30 to do as President is I had to stand up in the Senate, or I might have sat at the time,
31 and do a speech about Local Government and the role of Councillors, it was a
32 20-minute speech, but after all the Senators came over to us and they got it, like they
33 understood that we wanted to be involved in the decision-making in within the
34 Council. That's really important. At the end of the day when you're doing the

1 County Development Plan you're always told this is our plan. This is our Council, it
2 is up to us to support the Executive but to make sure that we get our thoughts across
3 as well, any ideas that we have.

4
5 So, Elaine, it's lovely to see you again, it's been too long. Paddy, it's good to see you
6 again. And I wish you well going on this roadshow throughout the country. It is
7 really important that the Members take stock about what has been said, because these
8 people are there for you to help you and I encourage you again please go to training
9 days. Thank you.

10 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Elaine, I'll take three comments at a time and
11 then we will come back to you. Councillor Tom Fortune.

12 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks Elaine and Councillor
13 Paddy for the presentation. Yeah, I think you are a very, very important organisation
14 and I think what you've delivered to date is excellent and will continue that way.
15 However, I have a however. I attended a conference in Sligo I think it's nearly two
16 years ago now. It was an excellent conference on local democracy, and the panel
17 you had on the day was excellent, a good cross-section of people, both from Ireland
18 and from Europe. And I think there's a massive issue - people will be fed up
19 listening to me but I have been saying it for a long time: I think the democratically
20 elected Councillors are being undermined and have been undermined for a number
21 of years. You mentioned in your presentation Local Government reform and
22 empowering Councillors but I think that needs to be addressed because a lot of
23 powers now are going back to the centre and they get re-sent down from the centre to
24 the Executive of the Local Authority, so basically if they get a dicta or paper they
25 have to do it and the Councillors are kind of cut out of it. As a public rep, as an
26 elected public rep, I feel very strongly about that. There's lots of stuff going on in
27 Local Government and at Local Government level, but as an elected Councillor I am
28 just wondering where it's heading and I would have serious concerns, and AILG are
29 the one organisation that can address that. But I am probably a little disappointed
30 reflecting back on the conference in Sligo that while a lot of good things were said at
31 that and a lot of good intent said at that I can't see where it has been delivered in any
32 real fashion, despite the fact that I said at the outset of my comments that as an
33 organisation ye have delivered an awful lot for Councillors, but I think right now
34 that's the key and that's where there's a tendency to think that Councillors don't have

1 a role. I'm sure a lot of us here sitting in the chamber would dispute that quite
2 emphatically. But yeah, that's the concern I would have, and I want to flag that. And
3 again thank you for coming to us today and talking to us. I would like you to take
4 that on board and I would like to hear something about it not necessarily today but
5 something solid.

6 MS LYNCH: Yes.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you want to come in on those three comments, and I will
8 bring in the next three speakers then?

9 MS O'BYRNE: Super. Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just to thank Councillor Gail
10 Dunne and Councillor Pat Kennedy for their kind comments in terms of the
11 important work that we do. And just, I know, Gail, you touched on the collaborative
12 work that we have done with the Women's Regional Caucus but also with NILGA.
13 And just to touch on the diversity participation, we recently signed a Memorandum
14 of Collaboration with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, and year
15 one of that project actually the theme of it is going to be on ending violence against
16 women and girls. So that's year one of our collaborative project. And again, that is
17 about getting Elected Members from both north and south of the island to come
18 together to talk about that issue. That is a joint event that we're looking to do
19 through the Shared Island Funding Stream. That is going to be taking place in
20 Q1/Q2 of next year.

21
22 Just to respond then to Councillor Fortune's comments. Absolutely I remember that
23 autumn training seminar very well. That I suppose would have been a very
24 important point in time because that would have been the point where the Council of
25 Europe Monitoring Committee had released their report which was quite a damning
26 report you'll remember at the time in terms of the local democracy structure here in
27 Ireland, in terms of the local autonomy that is at local level. And that was the issues.
28 We do have a very strong Local Government system but when it actually comes to
29 the local autonomy of Elected Members that is where we have a bit of an issue. Just
30 to say, Tom, I suppose that all of that conversation, and important conversation, we
31 had back in 2023 has led to the point where we are now, which was trying to get a
32 Local Democracy Task Force to have that discussion about the reform. So that is
33 ongoing at the moment. So what I would say is that I totally hear your comments but
34 we have five very strong Councillors sitting on that task force, then there are four

1 sub-pillar groups, working groups, as part of that task force work and they're
2 focusing on four different areas of Local Government. They are focusing on
3 structures, functions, funding, and governance and oversight. So each of those
4 working groups are working on issues and options papers. But again, the whole
5 purpose of that Local Democracy Task Force is to have a re-balancing at local level
6 in terms of Elected Members and the Executive I suppose side to bring it on equal
7 terms. So that is ongoing. What I would say is that they are reaching a critical point
8 at the moment where issues and option papers have been brought forward. Where
9 are we currently with our Local Government structure here in Ireland and where do
10 we want to get to? So over the next month or two, December/January, that's going to
11 be the critical point where recommendations are brought forward but my
12 understanding is the Chair Jim Breslin is quite firm on the timeline of that, so by
13 February of next year we will have some concrete recommendation and change in
14 our Local Government system. But look, from what we're getting through from our
15 representatives on the task force is it is quite positive in terms of what is being
16 discussed. So I would be quite hopeful that we will see strong change for next year.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I will bring in the next three speakers now.
18 Councillor Joe Behan.

19 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I know time is moving on, and I
20 am sure Elaine and Paddy need to be elsewhere as well. Just to say you're very
21 welcome here today, it is fantastic to hear what you have had to say to all the
22 Members here in Council, and the work you do is absolutely crucial to local
23 democracy in a broader sense. And it's also fantastic to see the former President,
24 Gail, back in action again, and making his mark as he always does. So, Gail, it's
25 great to see you back again.

26
27 Just if I could for a minute I want to highlight for Members the fact that we do get
28 this bulletin regular as clock work every Friday afternoon around 5 o'clock, of the
29 week's activities, what the AILG has done and what it is intending to do. Very, very
30 informative. And I want to welcome the fact that that is so regular and reliable, and
31 it is a great source of information for Members. But also we had a very vigorous
32 debate at our most recent plenary meeting last week on the points Councillor Fortune
33 has made there and the Local Government task force, and the powers that we are
34 seeking to have restored to the Members, the Elected Members, and, if you like, the

1 battle that's ongoing between Government departments, Chief Executives, Elected
2 Members and other outside bodies. And we continue to fight vigorously to get back
3 the powers that we have lost and to attain new powers, and as Elaine said the next
4 two months will be crucial in that process. But ultimately, whatever happens in the
5 task force report it goes to Government. The Government will have to decide
6 whether they want to accept it or not, and if they are going to accept it then they have
7 to roll out what actions they are going to take that will make the difference that
8 Councillor Fortune has mentioned. Up to now there's been a lot of talking. The
9 sounds, you know the moon music is good but I'll certainly judge it on what the
10 Government actually comes up with at the end and what goes through the Dáil in
11 terms of reform. But it is very, very important work for not just for us but for the
12 people out there, the people who are not here today, the people we represent, who
13 kind of expect us to do their work for them, and in the past we have not been able to
14 do the work we wanted to do and hopefully this task force will change that. So
15 again, it's great to see you, Elaine and Paddy. Thanks for coming today. Thank you
16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Lourda Scott.

17 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks Elaine and the AILG
18 for all the work you're doing. I just wanted to talk and I wonder could you expand
19 about the Women's Regional Caucus Network that you mentioned. I was in touch
20 with the AILG back in the 2019-2024 Council, and we'd set up a very successful
21 women's Councillors caucus here in Wicklow. Unfortunately I suppose the last
22 Local Elections didn't see the change in diversification particularly around the gender
23 area as we look across our own Local Authority here and across Local Authorities
24 across Ireland, and I am very interested to hear what the plans are really for the
25 Regional Caucus Network. It is certainly something I have been asking for for quite
26 some time. So thank you.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I am going to bring Councillor Miriam Murphy
28 in online.

29 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you for the
30 presentation. Really, really worthwhile. It was an honour to actually have
31 Councillor Dunne as President of the AILG last year, and it was great to see Gail
32 bring the conference in the Arklow Bay Hotel. And I think you can see the very
33 strong network of the Members at these conferences. Unfortunately I am not able to
34 get to because most of them are a long distance for me. But I think the importance of

1 it is that any conference and training, in a week or two after that event you can see it
2 on the webinar. So you're not missing out at all, and it's great to have that facility. I
3 think that as someone with disability who can't reach a lot of the conferences that is
4 brilliant. I would also like to just bring up something of disability, and I know due to
5 the conference being held in the Arklow Bay last year I was able to present
6 colleagues with our disability strategy that we had reviewed the year before, and
7 both from that Laura Callahan and myself...(inaudible)... of the AILG meeting and
8 going forward I think that we need AILG input on disability on their agenda. I know
9 that there is a keen interest from the Executive but I think it needs to be much
10 stronger because there is a huge, huge move for disability coming down the line with
11 the European Disability Strategy, and I think the Council Members need to have that
12 knowledge, not just on one section but on all sections of it. You know, how we
13 provide the service, our disability facilities, our documents going out for disability
14 proofing. Because people with disabilities are more clued in, and this is where our
15 knowledge -- and I think AILG has 949 Councillors, and it is a huge network to be
16 able to reach them. Only recently Members were invited to a forum on disability in
17 Cork and it went absolutely fabulous, and I would like to thank the people who went
18 to that. Again, that's around knowledge, and from that ...(inaudible)... has been
19 asked to do a case study. I will have to get Michael to explain the reason behind
20 that. But again this is where the knowledge of AILG need to be delivered in this
21 type of work. And I certainly would be willing to talk to you on that at another time.
22 But well done. Your network is so strong and it is great to see Gail, and it is great to
23 have Elaine and Paddy here today. Thank you.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Elaine, do you want to come in on those three
25 then?

26 MS LYNCH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just to thank Councillor Joe Behan for his
27 comments on the task force. Just to add to that, that was a very important discussion.
28 Again that brings my point home in terms of how important that plenary body of the
29 Association is in terms of teasing out policy and getting input directly back from the
30 Elected Members that we can then feed into our national policy, and I suppose that
31 was a really good exercise, Councillor Behan, in terms of teasing out some of the
32 potential recommendations or options that could be on the table with that Local
33 Democracy Task Force in terms of strengthening our CPG, strengthening up our SPC
34 and ensuring there's more funding and administrative support at Municipal District

1 level. Those kind of areas that we're teasing out.

2

3 Then just to touch on Councillor Scott's comments about the Women's Regional
4 Caucus Network. Just to expand on that, we had the very successful pilot project
5 which took place from 2021 to 2024. It did disband, just being conscious of the
6 Local Elections obviously and let that come to the fore. Yes, we didn't probably get
7 the results we were hoping for but it didn't mean that the work stops. If anything, it
8 need to drive us on even more. What I would say, Councillor Scott, is that we have a
9 meeting with the Department this week, tomorrow actually, to discuss our business
10 case for rolling out the Regional Caucus Network from next year, but the idea would
11 be that it would be similar to the Regional Assembly Areas. So you would have
12 three regional Cautious Networks Aligned to the Regional Assembly Areas. There
13 might be some leeway for maybe Local Authorities across the borders that they may
14 feel that maybe one Regional Caucus would suit their needs better. But the idea
15 would be then that would you have three Regional Caucuses that would meet a
16 couple of times a year, and you would have an annual programme of work decided
17 by the Elected Members, and the hope or idea would be that that national programme
18 of work would be filtered down at local level and brought through each Local
19 Authority. And then we're also hoping to have -- we've already spoken with the
20 Northern Ireland Local Government Association but there is a huge interest in
21 having an All-Island Caucus Network as well. They don't have something, they're
22 very interested in the work that we've done in that area, but there's huge interest on
23 their behalf in terms of collaborating. So that is where we are looking to get to. But
24 you're probably looking at, hopefully all going well with the Department this week,
25 that that will be rolled out in Quarter 1 of next year, where you will be gathering the
26 Elected Members and then by the end of next year the programme of work will have
27 been agreed and then it will be rolled out. But the idea is that this is going to be in
28 place then on a permanent basis up until 2029 and beyond.

29

30 And then just finally on the inclusion and disability, absolutely can I just say that our
31 most recent training webinar was actually on the European Accessibility Act and
32 what Councillors needed to know about that. We've worked very collaboratively
33 with Helen and with Councillor Vicki Casserly, some Members will be aware she
34 does excellent work in this field. And we always like to get input from Elected

1 Members who have lived through it and have the experience. We will be working
2 with Vicki going forward. But we also are hoping as part of the Regional Caucus
3 Network that the Association will as of next year have a participation and diversity
4 officer and again that they will be able to feed into that work, both of the Women's
5 Caucus but also in terms of inclusion and disability in general.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. There's just a few more speakers. Councillor
7 Dermot O'Brien.

8 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks to Elaine and
9 Councillor Paddy for the presentation. I mean to build on what Councillor Dunne
10 said, I actually feel that Councillors are centred by -- and I say that maybe it sounds
11 as if I am surprised, but I feel that AILG does centre Councillors in its work, and I
12 also feel that that's not transactional, that you don't expect something from me in
13 order to serve me. And I think that's very sincere, and I think your commitment is
14 very sincere. Whether it be newsletters -- I wish I could go to training and events,
15 some of that stuff, but the reality of the working life of some of us makes that
16 difficult. I guess that's always in the conversation. But the training, the research, the
17 webinars, the proactive engagement, I think all of them form very strong layers for
18 the significance and importance of AILG. So I want to pay tribute. And even I think
19 the connection with NILGA is also really fascinating. I think when we get to the
20 inevitable conversations about Irish unity those relationships also will matter very
21 significantly. I'd love to get -- I imagine it's really interesting for you on the
22 roadshow if you have been delivering all of them that you've got a really good sense
23 of where things are, and I would love to get your view on what do you think would
24 be the key, the most impactful recommendation that might come out of the task force
25 in terms of the future of the Local Government? Thanks a mill, Cathaoirleach.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Peir Leonard.

27 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Elaine and
28 Paddy. As an independent female Councillor who wasn't from a political
29 background, you know it's been tough going for the last few years and I'd love to say
30 that I'm not disillusioned about local democracy, but I am. Because it takes a lot of
31 energy. You put a lot of energy in working with the community and trying to get
32 things done, and the system just doesn't bend for, you know, that local voice. It takes
33 a long time to see stuff coming through. You know I suppose anything that I would
34 have worked on I probably mightn't see coming through for another ten years or

1 whatever. And community doesn't understand that. I thought by becoming a local
2 Councillor I would become privileged to what is planned for our local town but I
3 think there's gaps in that. And I know efforts are made to try and include us, but I do
4 think that sometimes it seems like a parallel universe is going on, that we're not privy
5 to everything. I would ask that be strengthened. If you are going to work on stuff,
6 and if you want to encourage women into politics, I would be reluctant to encourage
7 people in because every day there is a question am I going to stay or leave, and I feel
8 I am a strong person but to attract diversity into politics, which there should be, there
9 needs to be a place for softness and there needs to be a place that it is not all about
10 being forceful to get things done or to have to do deals and you know relinquish your
11 integrity and values. That's something that I would hold very important. I think
12 there should be support for women and independent Councillors in particular, female
13 independent Councillors, an advice line that they could contact that's independent for
14 advice when they're struggling with certain issues. And then on the other sort of
15 operational side of things, I do think something that is really important that needs to
16 be looked at, whether it's a kind of hybrid thing with councils and AILG or LAMA is
17 an app for Councillors to make representations because I think, you know, it is not
18 efficient how we operate, and I think it could be made more efficient. And I know
19 there was a customer service hub put into Wicklow County Council here and there
20 was supposed to be a back-end put in for Councillors which never manifested, and I
21 think that's something that needs to be -- because I'm sure even the staff dealing with
22 Councillors' reps if there was a system in place that we could be more efficient it
23 would save time, and then it would produce more resources then to work on more
24 positive stuff, rather than duplicating over and over again. So I think that if you had
25 resources or if you could look into creating an app, I know some of the Senators have
26 created an app just for information, but I think an app for reps for Councillors would
27 be very helpful and is something that should be looked at. Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Silvester Bourke.

29 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And, Elaine, thank you very
30 much. I want to say on behalf of the Fine Gael group how grateful we are and
31 thankful we are for the efforts that you have done on our behalf collectively over the
32 last few years that has resulted in the improvements that you mentioned there, like
33 the security allowance, the improved pay and conditions. I must say though that I
34 am a bit disappointed with our own party who were in Government during those

1 times for dragging their feet for so long in terms of bringing those implementations
2 into place. I think when Leo Varadkar and John Paul Phelan were there they could
3 have acted a bit more swiftly but I realise they're probably afraid of the media. That
4 brings me to my next point. I do feel that the role of Councillors is diminished a
5 great deal by national media and certain national journalists. I'll give you an
6 example of it. When there was a discussion before the last European Elections
7 candidates were being talked about in the media and one was described as, oh, sure
8 he's only a Councillor. This was Colm Markey, who I served with on the Regional
9 Assembly and who became an M EP subsequently when Mairead McGuinness I
10 think had to move on to greater things. So it is just that fear I think that Ministers
11 have of media diminishing decisions that are taken that improve the lot of
12 Councillors, I think that is something that needs to be addressed. Never forget that a
13 man who sat beside me here for 15 years ago was only a Councillor but he rose to
14 become Taoiseach, that's Simon Harris. We do need to keep that -- be mindful. And
15 when national journalists talk about us like that, about one person who is a
16 Councillor like that, they don't disrespect that person but they disrespect all the 950
17 people who have been elected as County Councillors. So I think that we should
18 definitely help and encourage you to ensure there's a strong voice to gain respect for
19 the role we all have taken on. And one last question is: Is there any implications for
20 auto enrolment for Councillors? That's all I'll say. Thank you very much.

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Elaine, do you want to come in on those three?

22 MS O'BYRNE: Yes. Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just to respond firstly to
23 Councillor O'Brien. Thank you very much for those comments. We really do
24 appreciate them. And I suppose while I'm here to encourage Elected Members to
25 avail of our training and education I'm acutely aware of how busy ye are as elected
26 representatives and probably juggling other responsibilities, be it other jobs or caring
27 responsibilities, home duties as parents. So that is one thing, we are conscious of
28 that; that our engagement doesn't perhaps reflect how invested Elected Members are
29 with AILG. We do have an excellent engagement rate in terms of our training but I
30 suppose the idea of the roadshow is that we want to be ambitious, we want to reach
31 as many Elected Members just to make sure that you're aware of the services that we
32 offer because, as I said, we're Member-led. We work cross-party. This is purely
33 about, the Association is about protecting the role and the voice of Councillors and
34 bringing that voice to national level and constantly fighting on your behalf if I can

1 put it as simply as that. So we appreciate those comments. Thank you.

2

3 In terms of what will be the most impactful recommendation to emerge out of the
4 task force, what I would say is there's a lot of recommendations. Can I just say
5 there's a lot of potential recommendations that are being discussed at the moment.
6 Nothing is decided. But I think in my own personal opinion the most impactful one
7 would be having AILG on a statutory footing in terms of consultation at national
8 level. Because we find the problem is there's decisions being made at national level
9 and when you're not at that table when those decisions are being made you're
10 fighting a losing battle. So you need to be there at the very, very start of any
11 discussion in terms of any changes at Local Government level that can potentially
12 impact on Elected Members and their decision-making. So we would be very
13 hopeful that that for us would be probably the most impactful.

14

15 In terms of the excellent points this Councillor made in terms of attracting diversity
16 and support for women, the advice line, we're actually hoping that the Women's
17 Regional Caucus Network, that part of that we're going to build in a leadership
18 programme but also a mentoring programme. We have a huge wealth of knowledge
19 from female Elected Members who have stepped away for whatever reason, but we
20 want to bring in that support key network. And I suppose that is a key part of what
21 the Women's Regional Caucus Network is looking to do; is to bring that solidarity
22 between female Councillors, that you feel you have someone to speak to. But in
23 terms of AILG what I would say is that our phone is always at the ready if you ever
24 have anything -- and that goes to any Elected Members, but if there's any advice that
25 ye ever want, myself or Tommy, our numbers are widely available. That can be on a
26 confidential basis of course, but it can be any matter, whether it is personal,
27 financial, policy advice, the Association is here to serve you. So that's what I would
28 say on that.

29

30 With the LMS system, we have spoken to I think Meath County Council, and a
31 couple of councils have that automatic system with representations. Some of them
32 are doing well, some of them there's still a bit of teething issues. It is something we
33 are aware of and investigating, but the feedback that we're hearing at the moment is
34 that it is not perfect yet but there is potential there, but I suppose again that comes

1 down to a decision of the Elected Members, whether some Members might prefer the
2 traditional route of making representations in person, but we have to be conscious of
3 moving forward with the time as well. Hopefully that answers that.

4
5 And then finally to Councillor Bourke, I couldn't agree more in terms of how the role
6 of the Councillors is portrayed in the media. I think it is a totally wrong narrative. It
7 doesn't help local democracy in any shape or form. Elected Members are the hardest
8 working. I think Local Government is the hardest working government or
9 democracy that we have in terms of our output in what Members do, but Local
10 Authorities as well in terms of the services they deliver, over 1,100 services. So I
11 think I totally agree with you on that. Again this is about enhancing the staff
12 complement of the Association, that we can counteract that narrative and again
13 promote the important and valuable work that the Elected Member does on a daily
14 basis. Your last question. And actually just to say, the AILG met the Tánaiste
15 Simon Harris on Tuesday of this week to report on the work that we are doing at
16 European level with our Irish delegation to the Council of Europe, and the first thing
17 he said was the hardest job I ever had was being a Councillor. So that just
18 emphasises the hard work and the hard-working nature of Elected Members in this
19 country.

20
21 And finally, is there any implication for auto enrolment? I take it you mean for
22 AILG, auto enrolment for Councillors? No. That's automatic. Once the Local
23 Authority pays the small annual subscription fee the Councillors automatically enrol.
24 So there's nothing that the Councillor has to do on their part, they just automatically
25 become part of the Association and can avail of the services that we offer. Hopefully
26 that clarifies that.

27 MS O'GORMAN: Can I just clarify, Councillor Bourke, you were asking about the
28 auto enrolment pension piece, were you? Yes. Okay. We will come back to you on
29 that.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: There are two more speakers. Councillor Avril Cronin.

31 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thank you very much. My contribution will be short. I
32 just want to thank Elaine. It's great to have you here, and Paddy as well for making
33 the journey to Wicklow today. As one of the Wicklow representatives on AILG I
34 see the huge work that goes into your role, and with the Members within AILG. We

1 have been very lucky to have a past president from Wicklow, and now we're very
2 lucky to have a member of the Executive here on Wicklow County Council as well.
3 And just to reassure Members that there are often issues that come up here in the
4 chamber that we bring to our plenary meetings. I'm only on AILG a year and I
5 certainly have gained a lot of experience and knowledge over the past year from
6 Members that are more experienced than I am on AILG. But to see the amount of
7 work that goes into the organisation and the value that's given to Councillors and
8 Councillors' views, and I see the huge work now that's going on at the moment with
9 the task force and last week's discussion as Joe said, it's vitally important that all
10 these issues are teased out and are heard. And I for one certainly feel that the
11 Councillors are being listened to and that our concerns and our issues are being
12 brought back to the powers that be, and I would just like to thank you again for
13 coming and I am delighted to be a member of the organisation and thank you very
14 much for all your help throughout the year.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor John Snell.

16 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks Elaine. Thanks to Paddy
17 for the presentation. First and foremost as someone that hasn't been to an AILG
18 conference or training day for a number of years, I want to put it on record that I
19 fully support the work they do. I have in years gone by attended a couple of events
20 and got a lot of input, been able to have a say at them and bring back a bit of
21 knowledge that they were sharing on the day. I just find in regard to Elected
22 Members, you know over the years there's been Councillors that have sat in this
23 chambers who have gone on, as Councillor Bourke has said, to bigger and better
24 things but there's others who become Senators and TDs, not Ministers, not Taoisigh,
25 and each and every one of them will readily admit that it's far more of a workload to
26 be a Councillor than at national level, because they have the support mechanisms in
27 place, such as personal assistants, fieldworkers, office staff. That's not available to
28 an Elected Member. And I think when you're talking about the female, the Women's
29 Caucus, and I appreciate the work that's gone on for many years, great strides have
30 been made. In 2009 when I came into this chambers there was one female out of the
31 32 in Wicklow County Council. Today it's great to say that there's nine Members on
32 Wicklow County Council, female Members. But if you're going to have a
33 conversation about getting more females involved in the political process I think you
34 must also look at when people step aside. The last three female Members who didn't

1 finish their term in Wicklow County Council coopted on males to take up that role.
2 So that's just over 9% of the make-up of this chamber. So you also have to factor
3 that into the debate that you're having. So you get females involved in politics. And
4 I don't know how you do it, because obviously if they're aligned to a political party
5 the party will decide who takes up that role. So maybe it's just something that you
6 could debate yourselves. I think the public reflect really what they want in the Local
7 Authority. And whether it is young or old, the various religious denominations, the
8 sexual orientation of the people that they make up or otherwise. And I do think that
9 society is changing in Ireland in regards to national and non-national, and that will be
10 reflected in this Council and it's already being reflected in a number of councils
11 throughout Ireland. I think it's a good thing and it's something that you as AILG will
12 be representing us in bringing that to the fore of our Members of 950. Because as we
13 all know the five-year terms goes fairly quickly. I just feel when you're putting on
14 programmes for training it's more aligned to people who are retired unfortunately,
15 that have the time, that they can go to -- and while you break it down to regions, it's
16 very difficult for people in Wicklow to go to Longford or Westmeath during the
17 week. And I know the option is there to go outside of your region at the weekend,
18 but that incorporates somebody going to Cork or Kerry on a Saturday. And I would
19 stand corrected that, my belief is that all 32 Members of this Local Authority are
20 here on the basis of the work that they do in their community and all the
21 organisations that they're based with, and that work predominantly takes place at
22 weekends, they are involved, and they have to put their family first as well. It is a
23 dilemma, something that you can't resolve here. I believe if you were properly
24 funded by Central Government that perhaps more training programmes could be
25 broken down to individual counties and therefore you would get more buy-in from
26 the county. There's a funding stream put aside for Elected Members' training. Some
27 people avail of it and some people don't. I haven't seen a breakdown of that as yet,
28 but I do think that we have to give every Elected Members the opportunity to have
29 the proper training that they need, and I do believe, as I say, the AILG are doing a
30 great job and should be funded better, but that's just my tuppence worth. Thanks
31 Elaine.

32 MS O'BYRNE: Thank you, Councillor Snell.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Elaine. That's all the questions now.

34 MS LYNCH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I really appreciate, I know there was* a

1 really good debate here and I am conscious of your time but thank you very much for
2 your time. Councillor Snell, you really hit the nail on the head there in terms of the
3 training programme. At the moment we're bound, we obviously have the training
4 remit with the Department of Housing and Local Government. At the moment we
5 have to deliver it on regional basis in line with the Regional Assembly Areas. We
6 brought two of the Regional Assembly Areas together to try and narrow it down to
7 two rather than three, but what I would say as part of our training needs analysis that
8 was a huge thing that came out of that from the Elected Members. We had over 400
9 responses and that was a huge thing that came through in terms of Councillors
10 having community commitments on weekends so they couldn't attend. So we are
11 looking at a new training programme from next year. Again this comes down to
12 staff complement; hopefully we'll have a new training and education officer. But
13 you hit the nail on the head, that midpoint of training where it is more localised and
14 then it is a smaller group, whether it is 20, 30 Councillors, more intense, it is maybe
15 a workshop rather than a half day. But we totally recognise that. That is on our
16 radar. Just to say as well that's not only on our radar but we do have an independent
17 consultant that we're working with to develop that training plan. Again that training
18 consultant also actually worked with -- people are aware the CARO, Climate Action
19 Regional Office, she developed their training plan. So we're working with her very
20 closely and expect that to rollout next year. We've identified that. At the moment if
21 there is any particular training area that Elected Members would like, we can do it,
22 myself or Tommy. We are obviously time poor but we have made efforts. And
23 that's done at the moment free of charge as part of our services that we will come in,
24 whether it is about reserved functions, whether it is something specific, we will do
25 our best on setting a time to come and deliver directly to you as well. But again,
26 until we get more beefed up in terms of our staff complement, but that's something
27 that we hope to -- that once that's in place that that's just another addition to what we
28 can do in terms of enhancing our supports to you. Okay. Thank you.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Great. Thank you again, Elaine and Councillor Paddy, for
30 your time and presentation. I think it was most interesting for everybody. Thank
31 you very much.

32 MS LYNCH: Thank you.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: The next item on the agenda, which is: "To consider and
34 adopt Wicklow County Council Biodiversity Plan." I would like to well Hannah

1 O'Kelly, our biodiversity officer, to come and make a presentation.

2 MS O'KELLY: Good afternoon everybody, Cathaoirleach, Members, colleagues. I
3 am delighted to be here to present the Biodiversity Action Plan 2026-2031. It's been
4 sometime coming and I am pleased to say that it's an ambitious plan, it's a good plan,
5 I also think it is an achievable plan, it's very important. Are my slides up? Okay. So
6 you can move on. So back one. So you'll have all been sent out the draft text, and I
7 hope you've had time to reflect on it. I am just going to give a very short
8 presentation and talk a little bit about what the plan is, what's in it. So we can move
9 on, please.

10

11 So why does this plan matter? Well, I have been working as an ecologist and
12 conservation scientist for 25 years, and I know we're in trouble, but I would say that
13 there is a growing recognition that climate break down, biodiversity loss, they're not
14 just abstract environmental concerns for people like me. People are increasingly
15 realising that these are very real and very urgent emergencies. And they're
16 interconnected emergencies. And this was recognised by this Council back in 2019,
17 and it's great that Wicklow was leading the way in this regard, that was before my
18 time, but I would say that definitely now it's time to put our proverbial money where
19 our mouth is and we really need to ramp up the actions to make sure we can get
20 ourselves out of trouble before it is too late.

21

22 We have to remember that nature is not just a nice to have, it is not an add-on luxury.
23 It doesn't matter whether you're into wildlife or whether you think that protecting
24 nature and the environment is a moral responsibility, the reality is all of human
25 society absolutely fundamentally depends on the functioning ecosystems. It
26 underpins our water quality, our food production, our climate regulation, our soil
27 health, our social wellbeing, our mental health, and fundamentally we're actually part
28 of nature. So we have no choice but to protect it and take care of it.

29

30 So bringing this home to Wicklow, somebody in an earlier presentation mentioned
31 that the Garden County is a very appealing place to be, and that is true. The flip side
32 of this is that this county also does face quite severe pressures. Pressures from urban
33 development, infrastructure development, from recreational pressures. We have
34 amazing uplands, we have a beautiful extensive coast, but this makes us vulnerable

1 to climate change. So we have to address these pressures. And one of the things that
2 makes Wicklow very appealing is its beautiful diverse landscapes. And in this
3 diversity is the key because in diversity there's resilience. So we have to focus on
4 protecting and restoring this diversity.

5
6 Next slide, please. So if that little spiel didn't convince you, as public servants we
7 also have a statutory obligation to protect biodiversity. The newest of these will be
8 the amendment to the Wildlife Act 2023 which brought in a biodiversity duty. So all
9 public bodies have a responsibility and a duty to incorporate a consideration for
10 biodiversity into all of our decision-making and our planning and our implementing.
11 This is to reference the Fourth National Biodiversity Action Plan which emphasises a
12 whole-of-Government approach. And I think, I would like to think that this plan also
13 echoes that in taking a whole-of-Council approach.

14
15 So we also have pre-existing obligations, the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive,
16 the Water Framework Directive, and we have new legislation, the Nature Restoration
17 Law. At the moment they are currently drafting the National Restoration Plan. So
18 that's all coming down the line. And then we have our All-Ireland Pollinator Plan,
19 and Wicklow County Council is a signatory to that plan. And we of course have
20 multiple objectives in our County Development Plan relating to natural heritage and
21 biodiversity.

22
23 So next slide, please. So when we were developing this plan we wanted it to be
24 ambitious but we also wanted it to be realistic. The reality is development pressures
25 aren't going away, the pressures of recreation aren't going away and climate change
26 isn't going away. So what we need to do is we have to identify a functioning
27 ecological network that spans all of the county and incorporates key habitats, species
28 and other ecological assets. So that is what this whole plan is built the around:
29 Identifying this ecological network, protecting what we have and restoring where
30 restoration is necessary. And that's where we build resilience in the face of these
31 increasing pressures.

32
33 Okay. Next slide. So it's been quite a lengthy process to develop this plan. It is
34 based on guidelines produced by the Heritage Council. So all Local Authorities are

1 obliged to produce a Biodiversity Action Plan by 2026. They're all following the
2 same guidelines, but there's room in there for each Local Authority to come up with
3 a plan that's appropriate for their area. We have been working on this for about the
4 past year, and I think one of the real strengths to this plan, and the process by which
5 it was developed, is our Biodiversity Working Group which we set up just over a
6 year ago. And the reason that I think this biodiversity work is so strong and it's been
7 such a help to me in developing the plan is that we have very wide representation on
8 it. So we have representation from right across the different agencies; from National
9 Parks and Wildlife to Fisheries, to local community groups, NGOs, representatives
10 from the PPN. So we have a lot of expertise in the room, and people have given a
11 huge amount of time to sit down and figure out what actions need to be in the plan.
12 Now, we got it narrowed down to 50. It could have been twice that or three times
13 that. But again, we want this to be a plan that we can actually implement.

14
15 So I mentioned that we want it to be a whole-of-Council plan. Even with the best
16 will in the world I am just one person. It is great that we have had role in the Local
17 Authority, but we are going to need to take a collaborative approach, both across all
18 the sections of the Council and then also working with other groups. And just to say
19 that we had quite an extensive public engagement and consultation process, so this
20 mirrored the statutory process that other plans go through, like the County
21 Development Plan and the Climate Action Plan.

22
23 Okay, next slide, please. So one of the most common questions I got once I started
24 this process was: Well, what is the remit of the plan? Is this a Wicklow County
25 Council plan or is this a County Wicklow plan? And I suppose the answer is both
26 really. We have -- to explain it I will break it down into three different sort of groups
27 of actions, and I'll talk about each of those.

28
29 So next slide, please. So the first of these groups of actions are Council-led actions.
30 So these are actions that we're either focusing on our own internal processes and
31 trying to incorporate best practice for biodiversity into the work that we do but also
32 working specifically on Council-owned or Council-managed land. And we have
33 some really nice natural heritage biodiversity assets under Council management, so
34 there's a lot of potential to do work on these lands. So I have just put these pictures

1 up to remind me of what I am supposed to talk about. This is out at Brittas where we
2 are actively trying to restore the habitats out there and we have been for quite a
3 number of years. We have a management plan that we are implementing and that is
4 also replicated at Bray Head where we're just starting to implement work there. And
5 also Wicklow Head, we've just finished a plan and we're going to hopefully start
6 implementing work this year. And the same for Magheramore which has just
7 recently come under our management. Also at Clermont where we're doing a lot of
8 work.

9
10 So next slide, please. So the second group of actions is where we're partnering with
11 other agencies or organisations, and for the most part these are kind of bigger
12 projects. It's really important that we can implement some of these projects at least
13 at scale, and that's where we're really going to have biodiversity impacts. So we are
14 working with lots of different organisations. We have some long running projects
15 like the Wicklow Barn Owl Project, we working with NPWS. This picture up here is
16 a new project. We put in an application earlier this year to an EU Horizon Project,
17 the Spongeworks Project. It was open to all Local Authorities. I believe quite a
18 number of them applied. Our application was the only successful one, so we were
19 delighted about that. This project is all about slowing the flow of water. So
20 identifying areas where we can implement measures to slow down water. This is in
21 Toulouse where we went to the launch in September, and we will be having a launch
22 here in January, and I would be happy to see some of you there.

23
24 Next slide. So the last group of actions is where we as the Local Authority can
25 support or facilitate communities to implement actions. So this can be individuals,
26 community groups, NGOs, any type of community-led action. So this picture is
27 from one of the Citizen Science workshops. We started a programme of citizens
28 science training this summer. We held workshops in each of the Municipal Districts.
29 They were really well received. And they're a great way of raising public awareness
30 but they're also actually collecting scientific data. That's the point of Citizen
31 Science.

32
33 And next slide, please. So just a little bit on implementation. We're just following a
34 fairly simple, coherent, cyclical implementation process. So the first step is

1 obviously to assess what we have. Now, we actually have a lot of work to do in
2 assessing what we have, identifying what the priorities are, and this all goes back to
3 delineating this ecological network, that we're going to hang all these actions on. So
4 as I say, there's a lot of mapping, survey work required to update our baseline data,
5 ecological data for the county. So that's going to take a lot of effort over the next
6 couple of years. Then we get on to implementing the actions around this network.
7 So protecting key sites, key natural features and enhancing certain places, certain
8 features when they need restoration. Engagement is a huge part, because a lot of
9 these actions we simply cannot do alone, we will be working with other partners or
10 we will be working with communities to implement these actions. And of course a
11 monitoring and reporting system is also very important. So this cycle is an adaptive
12 management cycle, so we will be implementing our actions, trying to determine what
13 impact they have and then feeding it back into the cycle.

14
15 Okay. Next slide, please. So a little bit more detail on that. I mentioned the
16 Biodiversity Working Group. Now that we have the plan written that will transition
17 I foresee into a steering group. And so, they will help guide the implementation of
18 the plan over the next five years. We will be reporting every year to the SPC and to
19 the full Council. We will be setting a work plan and then we will be reporting back
20 on it. We'll also be reporting to the Heritage Council who oversee the Biodiversity
21 Officer Programme nationally. And we have annual reporting responsibilities. This
22 year was the first year we had to report nationally on our biodiversity duty. So that
23 is what is Wicklow County Council doing for its obligations under the National
24 Biodiversity Action Plan. This year the reporting wasn't too onerous but I can see
25 that is definitely going to increase into the future especially since we now have the
26 Nature Restoration Law, we don't know what's going to be in the National
27 Restoration Plans, how much of it is going to fall to Local Authorities, but in my
28 opinion we are going to be asked to deliver significantly more, and we are already
29 being asked to deliver a lot for climate, for biodiversity. And in this plan we are
30 committing to delivering a lot, so I would say fundamental to us being successful in
31 that we're going to need more resources, and particularly we're going to need more
32 targeted ecological capacity.

33
34 Next slide please. Okay. So I am just ending with a quote. I think it is really

1 important that we remember that we are not something that's aside from nature, we're
2 all part of nature. And this is a quote from Dr Aoibhinn Ní Shúilleabháin. Thank
3 you very much. I have left lots of time for questions, and I have forgotten lots of
4 things I wanted to say so I am sure they will come up in the sections. Sorry next
5 slide. Is there another slide? Okay. It's fine

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Hannah. That was a really lovely presentation. I
7 must say the illustrations are beautiful and really show why we're here and what
8 we're protecting. I will start with questions, taking three at a time. Councillor Erika
9 Doyle.

10 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you, Hannah. I am
11 sure you have enjoyed working on every minute of it but I am sure you will be happy
12 to see it out of your hands today. I am going to talk for a minute on this for a couple
13 of reasons. I think your first slide was fantastic in how some people view
14 biodiversity. I know a lot of the Members here, particularly the ones on the SPC, are
15 quite clued into the importance of biodiversity and the fact that we are in a
16 biodiversity crisis at the moment, but not everybody is. I had two conversations only
17 in the last week, one was with an elected representative, that kind of reminded me
18 that not everybody understands that biodiversity isn't just nice flowers on a
19 roundabout.

20

21 So I just wanted to note a couple of things. Nature is declining at a rate never seen
22 before in human history. Our future generations rely on healthy ecosystems for their
23 food, health and the economy. The Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and
24 Ecosystem Services Report says that nature's decline is unprecedented, that species
25 extinction rate is accelerating, that the global response is insignificant and that
26 transformative changes are needed, and that a million species are threatened with
27 extinction. So this isn't something for somebody else. This isn't about flowers on a
28 roundabout. This is about our very survival. That report was compiled by 145
29 expert authors from over 50 countries with inputs from another 310 authors. It is
30 based on a systematic review of 15,000 government and science sources.

31

32 In Ireland, and so it follows in Wicklow, one in every third species of bee is
33 threatened with extinction. Bees are responsible for over a third of global food
34 production. As pollinators, they fertilise plants to produce seeds and fruit. Not only

1 does that provide us with our fruit and vegetables but they also provide the food
2 eaten by livestock. In Europe 80% of crops are pollinated by bees. Their extinction
3 threatens entire ecosystems. Fish and birds have suffered population decline and are
4 in danger of extinction. The biomass of insect life is drastically reduced. We only
5 need to look at when we drive somewhere we used to be full of insects on our
6 windscreens, even when I was a kid, that doesn't happen anymore.

7
8 There is some light at the end of the tunnel, and that same report states that it is not
9 too late to make a difference but only if we act now at every level from local to
10 global. Biodiversity initiatives and staffing remain chronically underfunded by
11 Government. Here in Wicklow this Biodiversity Action Plan will help us structure,
12 implement, deliver and enforce biodiversity protection and restoration initiatives and
13 halt nature loss. And it is to be noted as well that this is a living document so as new
14 data and research emerges it can be updated accordingly.

15
16 So this is a really, really important piece of work that has been done primarily on
17 Hannah's shoulders over the last year but I just want to thank as well Teresa, Marc,
18 the two Sarahs, Jim, Maeve, Julie and Mary, and everybody else involved,
19 particularly the community stakeholders on the SPC who are there because of their
20 passion for these subjects. There was extensive engagement, as Hannah has said,
21 even before it came to the SPC there was huge stakeholder engagement. We had
22 work-shopped it. Everybody had the opportunity to come to Hannah either through
23 the SPCs or individually, so I think you know everything that everybody wanted to
24 say was said and multiple times and discussed and is present in this document. So it
25 is a very, very thorough document.

26
27 So just to say as well, you know, we should have five Hannahs, and we don't, we
28 have one. And the work she has put into this is absolutely extraordinary. So thank
29 you, Hannah, for your time and patience and really hard work on this. So I will
30 leave at that.

31
32 Just to say that I would like to propose the adoption of the Biodiversity Action Plan.
33 Thank you, Chair.

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Lourda Scott.

1 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks again, Hannah. We're
2 almost sick of discussing the Biodiversity Plan which is a fantastic thing to say. It's
3 come in front of our SPC numerous occasions. We had a really, really engaging and
4 useful workshop. And just for the rest of the Elected Members here, it's been a
5 really, really excellent example of how collaboration both with the staff, along with
6 Elected Members, Members of the SPC and also the wider community have come
7 together to help produce a really excellent policy report which will shape the
8 biodiversity within our county for the next several years, and largely thanks to
9 Hannah and her team's trojan work steering this behind the scenes. But as I said, it is
10 just a really nice example of that collaboration piece and I think it is shown in the
11 excellent objectives and ambitions really of this policy that you have presented here
12 in front of us.

13
14 I suppose just a quick sort of note of question, and it's just you refer to it, Hannah,
15 under the piece on the Nature Restoration Plans, I suppose the future work that may
16 fall to the Local Authority. And again just wanting to sort of make the note that
17 already a massive amount of work is falling to the Local Authority under climate and
18 biodiversity, and to be fair to Wicklow County Council and the staff you've really
19 risen to that challenge and put resources in and maximised the resources that are
20 there as much as possible. And I suppose just to say that whatever we can do as
21 Councillors or, speaking for those of us in parties, to our party colleagues, I
22 particularly ask the people here with party colleagues in Government to make that
23 case for additional resources. Because while some resourcing has been put to the
24 climate action teams there certainly is a lot that needs to be done, and we can see this
25 through the policy pieces that are coming out of the team.

26
27 Before I wrap up I want to say it was literally two years ago to this month that I had
28 invited young children that were involved with the Children's Assembly on
29 Biodiversity Loss to speak on their findings to the then as it was named Climate and
30 Biodiversity SPC in this chamber, and they spoke with the Chief Executive and to
31 senior Members of Wicklow County Council, and they presented their findings from
32 their own assembly. They had 58 calls to action, all centred around biodiversity. I
33 suppose two of their asks have stuck in my mind as I was listening to this. One was
34 that future generations must live in a world where there isn't a biodiversity crisis. So

1 that's coming from the voices of our young Wicklow children. And secondly, that
2 children don't have to take action because of the inaction of past generations. So I do
3 think if those children that made up that assembly were here today they would be
4 very happy and confident that those actions are being addressed by Wicklow County
5 Council and that they would be very welcoming of this biodiversity policy as I
6 certainly am. And I would like to second this as well. So thanks, Hannah.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

8 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks very much, Cathaoirleach. Thanks,
9 Hannah, for the presentation. I am on the committee, the SPC, and I never claim in
10 any sense to be an expert on any of the issues but I think it consistently fascinates
11 me, even the fact that I mean I was in this chamber in 2019 when people came in to
12 declare that crisis, and the energy on that day was a mixture of hope and anticipation
13 but also a qualified sense of whether anything will happen or be done. And I think
14 it's really interesting to reflect on the fact that a county council would create a role
15 like Hannah's and attract someone like Hannah into that role, because I think that's a
16 critical part of where we've ended up, and also to scan around an SPC and see
17 Councillors who bring specific expertise to this field which I think is an asset to us as
18 well as other Members on the SPC. So I am always learning on that SPC, and I think
19 that's so worthwhile. And I won't repeat what has been said but I really genuinely
20 think that the process deserves a lot of praise and I think that's again something that
21 could be replicated any time that we are initiating processes where there's a big
22 outcome like this, and it's a Biodiversity Action Plan, it's not just a plan, it's not full
23 of notions, there's a whole lot of expectation in there. The only question I would ask
24 you Hannah is, and it's very loaded but: What's the biggest threat to the success of
25 this plan? Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. So do you want to come in on those three
27 speakers?

28 MS O'KELLY: Thanks. It is very gratifying to hear that people feel the process was
29 detailed and collaborative. It definitely was, as I said. I think we were very
30 fortunate. I'm not sure how this was replicated across other Local Authorities -- or
31 sorry, across other counties, but certainly here it was very easy to get the right people
32 in a room and to put the time into this. Not very easy, but people were willing to do
33 it and that makes a big difference. A couple of things.

34

1 Councillor Doyle, you read out kind of a stark list of statistics, and it's a list that we
2 hear different versions of all the time, and I have worked in conservation for a long
3 time, and I have come around to thinking that at some point you can just tell people
4 how badly things are going over and over again, but then people start to get a little
5 bit deaf to it so it is one of the reasons that I am actually really excited about the
6 Nature Restoration Law and National Restoration Plans which I know people are
7 apprehensive about for a variety of different reasons, some of which are very
8 justified. But once we start talking about restoring habitats and populations that's
9 something that people can get really behind, and it's something positive, and it also
10 brings people a sense of stewardship and ownership that's really important. So I
11 think to kind of flip over all those statistics is to start talking about restoration and
12 what we can do to change the trajectory.

13

14 Councillor Scott, you touched on collaboration and the ambition of the plan. So the
15 stated aim of this plan is echoing national and EU objectives to halt biodiversity loss
16 by 2030. Now, we are being aspirational here, but I think we have to aim high. And
17 certainly we won't be able to do that without collaboration and without more people
18 working on it.

19

20 Thanks, Councillor O'Brien. You asked what is the biggest threat to this plan. God,
21 that's a difficult question to answer. I think that biodiversity -- so I left this country
22 20 years ago and nobody even knew what biodiversity was. When I came back three
23 years ago everybody has been all about biodiversity. And that's great, but its light
24 was dimmed a little bit. It was all the rage a little while ago. Now we're facing huge
25 societal challenges and I'm not hearing people talking about biodiversity. There is a
26 risk it is going out of fashion a little bit, as it were, which is why I am trying to
27 emphasise it can't. So I think we just need to keep it front and centre

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Great. Thank you. The next speaker then, Councillor Danny
29 Alvey.

30 COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and I will be brief as I was a
31 member of the Biodiversity Working Group and I know a huge amount of time has
32 been spent on this plan. I wanted to congratulate Hannah on the effectiveness of the
33 working group as has been mentioned by a couple of other Councillors and its
34 meetings, and I think learnings could be definitely applied to other plans of this scale

1 in terms of how we went about those working group meetings and what came out of
2 them. It is a really comprehensive plan but it is really important that it is actionable
3 and achievable. A really important element of that was limiting the objectives to 50
4 which we were very clear throughout the process. It is also really welcome to have
5 the engagement of all the other stakeholders across the county. I know lots of them
6 are very excited, including ReWild Wicklow, to get involved in this plan and carry
7 out some of these actions, and I am looking forward it being fully adopted here
8 today. If I were to answer Councillor O'Brien's question though I think the biggest
9 threat to this plan is resources because we have one Hannah and we have 50
10 objectives, and each of these biodiversity initiatives takes quite a lot of work I can
11 tell you speaking from experience. So I think some of the conversations that are
12 scheduled to be on the agenda later today around parks development are very, very
13 timely indeed because I think that would be critical if we are to try and make any
14 headway into reaching some of these lofty objectives in this plan. Again
15 congratulation, Hannah. I look forward to the plan being fully adopted.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Peter Stapleton.

17 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thank you. Yeah, my question follows on the
18 theme of what is the biggest threat to this plan and I suppose asking the question of
19 what consideration was given to how this policy maybe comes up against the other
20 policies that Wicklow County Council holds or Wicklow, the goals that the county of
21 Wicklow has as a whole? I suppose when I look at a plan or a policy like this, and
22 you're asking me to protect nature, restore biodiversity, I think, yeah, yeah, perfect,
23 no problem, but I don't really know what that's going to cost me, doing all those
24 things. And if it is just a case of resourcing and that we can do biodiversity over here
25 while we continue to do everything else, like develop houses, develop roads, develop
26 infrastructure over here, then that's easy to do, but if they're going to come into
27 conflict then I think it's important that we know that upfront and we're clear about
28 what our real plan is. And I think that's partially why we have maybe lost a bit of
29 traction in the debate or the noise around biodiversity. Because people are all for it
30 when they hear about it being to protect and restore nature but then when they hear
31 things about projects being stalled because a bat survey needs to be redone or we're
32 not able to go through a certain route because we've got to protect 30 bats, this all
33 could be unfair but that is kind of the public perception out there. And so, asking
34 that question of how it interacts with just how and what we are trying to do generally

1 with our lives is one question.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Peir Leonard.

3 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yeah, thanks. I just wanted to extend my thanks to
4 Hannah and the team, and Teresa and the whole wider team, and all of the people
5 that sat on the steering committee. There was a lot of expertise there with all the
6 NGOs. I think it is about balance. I think if it is not on paper and we're not having
7 the conversations about it going forward it is about bringing people on board. When
8 I ran first for the elections the majority of people behind me were about, they wanted
9 to protect nature and heritage and our natural heritage going forward. Look it, there's
10 plenty of places to build, and it doesn't have to be houses versus biodiversity, there's
11 a way of doing both. But it is just about being more conscious about it. And going
12 forward, I just think this is a brilliant piece of work today but I think the chamber is
13 almost too small for it, I think it needs to be launched in a bigger way in the county
14 with more people involved, whether that's through the libraries, I don't know, I think
15 it needs to be sent to the Chamber of Commerce as well, and the businesses. And,
16 you know, it needs to have that wide reach across all the sectors and all the SPCs as
17 well. And it should be compulsory reading. I just want to thank the team again.
18 Thank you.

19 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. We have one more speaker, so I will bring her in.
20 Councillor Miriam Murphy online.

21 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. It is a big world, and as
22 some of my colleagues said there is how do you balance it? And I think my concern
23 in some of the biodiversity is that as Councillors people are coming to us saying why
24 is this not being cut or why was that not done because of -- and I think trying to get
25 the public to understand biodiversity, we hear the word a lot, do we take it in? In
26 reality, I probably don't, and I probably apologise for that. And I think we all have
27 ...(inaudible)... on the chamber or whatever, but it is a huge I won't say fashionable
28 word, but it is a big word, and I think there is a lot of background to it, and the
29 understanding of the background. And I just wonder, again as a colleague said there,
30 the resources have such an impact, and to have one leader doing it you know
31 ...(inaudible)... in respect of disability, limited resources and any other programmes
32 that come through the Council resources are a huge problem, to get that message out
33 to fully to understand what it means and how it affects us in our daily work as
34 Councillors to bring that message to the public, well, this is why this is not

1 happening or this is why this is happening. Well done. Thank you.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Actually there's one more Councillor online.
3 Councillor Jason Mulhall.

4 COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I would just
5 like to congratulate Hannah and the team on the Biodiversity Action Plan, the huge
6 effort that went into it. I echo what the other Councillors have suggested. For me, I
7 do agree, resources being one of the biggest threats and probably to be perfectly
8 honest and maybe less popular I think there's a lot of knowledge within public
9 representatives, Councillors TD, Ministers and so on, who a lot of time see
10 short-term goals rather than the longer-term needs. Thank you.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Hannah. Do you want to come in on those?

12 MS O'KELLY: Thanks everybody. Okay. That's a lot. So, Councillor Alvey, yes, I
13 absolutely take your point about the lack of resources going forward being a risk, and
14 that is the case. It's great that we have such a brilliant Climate Action Team of
15 which I am a part. But as you say, 50 actions is a lot and we definitely will need
16 more -- we will need to ramp up our resources. But again, we will be working with
17 other organisations, other agencies, including ReWild Wicklow, and communities.
18 So it's all about collaboration.

19

20 So a couple of people have talked about -- Councillor Stapleton, it was you who
21 asked about competing priorities. Like, there's no point in beating around the bush,
22 like there definitely is conflict between some of these areas. And Councillor
23 Leonard and Councillor Murphy talked about balance, and I think that's the key. It's
24 about achieving a balance. I spoke about this concept of biodiversity duty. So just
25 like now it's almost second nature that we have to think about -- for example, in an
26 entity like a county council we have to think about proper representation of women
27 and all sorts of other diversity, it's there now, it's engrained into us, but it wasn't there
28 ten, 20 years ago, that's what we have to do with biodiversity. Every decision that's
29 made there in the back of our heads it has to be what's the implication for the
30 environment, for nature? And we have to make difficult choices. That's why this
31 idea of the ecological network is so important. Because I'm not saying we have to
32 protect everything everywhere, we can't do that, that's unrealistic, what we need to
33 do is identify what we need to protect to maintain ecological functionality and make
34 sure that the mechanisms and resources are in place to do that. And that's what we're

1 trying to do with this plan.

2

3 So, Councillor Mulhall, your point was about raising people's awareness about the
4 importance, fundamental importance of ecological systems, and I agree. And there's
5 a lot in the plan about raising people's awareness. Again it is about getting to think a
6 little bit more deeply about how we depend on biodiversity. Yeah, I think that's
7 more or less everything.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I am going to call on the Director of Services
9 Theresa O'Brien to come in.

10 MS O'BRIEN: I would like to say that I am delighted that we are presenting this
11 plan today. As the Members of the SPC have said, it has been a long time and a lot
12 of hard work has gone into what is in front of you today. It is a landmark plan. It
13 brings national diversity policy to life at a local level. We are lucky in this county,
14 we have a unique landscape, rich natural heritage and now we have a Local
15 Biodiversity Plan to bring all that together.

16

17 I would like to personally thank Hannah and the Climate Action Team and the other
18 staff for all their work. I was a member of the working group, a wide group of
19 interested parties, and to be honest I have never sat on a group that had as much
20 enthusiasm for bringing a plan together.

21

22 Just in relation to delivering the actions of the plan in line with all our other services,
23 I suppose it is our hope that we will deliver all our services hand-in-hand in a
24 balanced way going forward. And we will as a team, and I know Hannah will as
25 well, try access any available resources that are Local Government, National
26 Government, Central Government, European, we will try and access as much of
27 those as we can for the delivery of this plan. So once again just to thank Hannah
28 because a phenomenal amount of work went into it.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Hannah, and to all the team with you, thank you
30 very much. It was a great plan. So we have a proposer. Do we have a seconder?
31 Councillor Lourda Scott. Everybody agreed? (Agreed.) Great. Thank you very
32 much. (Applause.)

33

34 So the next item on the agenda is: "Consideration of membership of the Bray to

1 Greystones Cliff Walk Management Committee." And I will bring in the Chief
2 Executive on this first.

3 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Members. As you
4 know, there was a proposal at last month's plenary meeting to bring this back as a
5 headed item on this agenda today. In the interim there was a task force meeting with
6 the Tánaiste, which was very positive, where the Tánaiste has committed to funding
7 of the next stage of the process which is getting subject-matter experts to do the
8 detailed designs and route options and just to get the work going on it. I suppose the
9 Tánaiste welcomed the suggestion of expanding the Cliff Walk Management
10 Committee to those external to the Council. As you know, I suppose the Committee
11 is a committee of the Council. It is a matter for the Elected Members of this Council
12 to decide the shape and format of that and how that is to be expanded. I know the
13 Cliff Walk Committee have met recently on the matter, and I know they had some
14 considerations around that, Cathaoirleach. I will hand back to yourself there.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. Councillor Doyle.

16 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, just briefly to say, so we
17 had -- I chair the Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk Management Committee. We had a
18 meeting in the last week on the back of the Tánaiste's statement and the good news
19 about the support that the Tánaiste will give certainly in respect of funding. We did
20 discuss the terms of reference and we did discuss expanding the terms of reference to
21 include representation from local groups, a representative from Bray and a
22 representative from Greystones. We did not as of yet decide a method on deciding
23 who that should be, but certainly there are representative groups that have made
24 themselves known that are very involved and have been from the start and I would
25 welcome their engagement on the committee. So I think that we will proceed with
26 that and work together in a collaborative fashion hopefully to progress this.

27

28 Just to say that we are very committed as a committee. I suppose speaking with my
29 Bray Councillor hat on, you know I do have probably the same concerns as
30 everybody else where you know I live in Bray East, I live in the shadow of Bray
31 Head, I am a resident there, my friends and neighbours walk the Cliff Walk or did
32 every day; I want to get this done as quickly as possible. I suppose I am a little -- I
33 have a little concern about the timescale. It seems ambitious. My main concern as
34 well is the pressure on the two fantastic, committed engineers we have in Bray but

1 they are just two, nonetheless. And I would have concerns around things like the
2 Ballywaltrim pitches. So I would have committed to Ardmore Rovers that we would
3 work on developing the Ballywaltrim pitches for the hundreds and hundreds, if not
4 thousands, of young people that use those pitches every week. I am concerned that
5 we will have to I suppose move resourcing from projects like that. It's perhaps not
6 for discussion here; we are I suppose here just to discuss the membership. But just in
7 an overall sense I suppose in the more collaborative way we work the better, where
8 everybody can have their input and everybody can push forward to achieve the
9 common goal which is to get the Cliff Walk open as soon as possible. So thank you,
10 Cathaoirleach.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Doyle. Councillor Stephen Stokes.

12 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach. And I would also
13 like to support the proposal. I certainly welcome the RPS report and the positive
14 statement from the task force. I warmly welcome that it looks like we should be able
15 to secure funding for the work that's needed. I think it's absolutely vital. The Cliff
16 Walk means a great deal to us in the Greystones Municipal District as it does in the
17 Bray Municipal District, and for people from around Ireland and across the world
18 that like to use it. And I am quite keen that we, you know, move it along as
19 efficiently as we can, and I will certainly do everything I can to support it. I
20 welcome the fact that we're looking to bring in an additional members from the
21 community. I think it's a reasonable proposal because we can then look at it again to
22 see in the future if we need to, you know, expand it further again, you know, because
23 in the future we may have other stakeholders, whether it is from business or residents
24 groups or other external bodies that we may want to bring in. So I think that this is a
25 very reasonable proposal and have my full support. It would be great to have more
26 community voices involved. So go raibh maith agat.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Stokes. Councillor Tom Fortune.

28 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, I think the feedback
29 we've got or we've taken from the task force meeting is all positive and the whole
30 intention of it, as I picked up, is to resolve this matter very, very quickly. There's a
31 lot of local interest in it. And then we -- I speak for myself but I am sure other
32 Members might feel the same. Speaking as public reps we're in the frontline of it so
33 you know it is very, very important that this thing moves in a positive way. My
34 understanding from reading the various releases is there's another meeting going to

1 take place in two weeks. I think the Tánaiste did say I think as part of the meeting
2 that in tandem with what's going on with the longer-term project that there's a need
3 to put in place a short-term project. Now, I think that's essential and I have
4 personally been saying that for a long time. I think we need to have a short-term
5 situation in place. The RPS report, as I said, and the task force, as I have said
6 already, is all positive and constructive. So that's all good.

7
8 I think the Cliff Walk Committee, like, has an important role from the point of view
9 of representation in the whole matter but it has a different challenge to what it was
10 originally set up for, so I think it is only right to expand it. I would certainly be in
11 favour of expanding it and bringing in perhaps two members from the Greystones
12 side and two members maybe from the Bray side. And then from a public rep
13 perspective, I don't know how we want to deal with that, whether that should go back
14 to each district and then deciding what's going to happen there. But I think all public
15 reps should have an input into it because at the end of the day as it came up in earlier
16 parts of the meeting when talking about different things, especially with the AILG
17 presentation, we all represent the public, we're all being looked at, people won't look
18 and say, well, it's only that responsibility. So I think that needs to be looked at.

19
20 And maybe, I don't know whether this is accurate or not, but my understanding is
21 that Irish Rail have indicated somewhere along the line that what happens with the
22 Cliff Walk won't impact what they're going to do, so it can actually be resolved or
23 sorted kind of without being held up, say, by Irish Rail. I don't know if I am quoting
24 that accurately but that is my understanding.

25
26 But my final comment on it would be, I think it's in a very positive place now from
27 where it's come from and I think it's on us all to act in a positive way, keep it pushed
28 and I do actually think it's very clear in the press releases that the short-term situation
29 is on the table as well and that needs to be addressed and there needs to be a timeline
30 put on it in my view. Thanks.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Joe Behan.

32 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. First of all, a few
33 acknowledgments if I could. First of all, I want to acknowledge the input that the
34 Chief Executive has had in this process since this particular problem has become so

1 manifestly an issue for the people of Bray and Greystones and beyond. I think she
2 has acted in a very proactive manner and has listened very carefully to what we as
3 Councillors have said about it. And I want to welcome her engagement with the task
4 force as well.

5
6 If I would be critical of anyone it would be the Tánaiste in not having a meeting for
7 almost a year after the first meeting was held. However, at least a meeting was held.
8 And I was very happy to speak at the most recent meeting that was held by the
9 Friends of the Cliff Walk in Greystones where I suggested, as they have been very
10 positively saying at the beginning, at the outset of that meeting, they want to help,
11 they want to make a contribution, and I was quite happy to suggest that they be
12 invited to make a contribution in a formal manner by being invited to take a number
13 of places on this new Cliff Walk Committee. So I was very happy that the Tánaiste
14 picked up on that idea, that the Chief Executive picked up on it and that it is now, if
15 you like, formed or is going to form part of our policy going forward.

16
17 The other acknowledgment I want to make, and I think it's important we make it, is
18 there's two representative of the Friends of the Cliff Walk sitting in the gallery today,
19 Peter Murtagh and Dermot O'Dwyer. And, like, from my point of view they have
20 done such a huge public service by consistently highlighting the fact that the Cliff
21 Walk needs to be open as a matter of urgency. In fact, they actually physically did
22 work to help people to get onto it again. Now, when I spoke at the meeting I said I
23 can understand there's a reluctance from the point of view of a decision-making
24 Chief Executive who holds ultimate responsibility for safety and public safety, I can
25 understand where things have to be put in place that she and others can stand over
26 the safety of whatever facility we reopen, but there is not a huge understanding
27 among the general public that in fact it needs to be closed at all. And the public are
28 actually voting literally with their feet by walking on it every day in their hundreds if
29 not in their thousands.

30
31 So we have a situation where now we have a Tánaiste and a Minister for Finance
32 who says he accepts the RPS report, we have a Council and a Tánaiste and a Chief
33 Executive who are saying it's a good idea to expand the committee. What I think
34 people want to see next is action as quickly as possible. And from my point of view

1 one of the things that needs to happen is, the newly expanded Cliff Walk Committee
2 should be meeting this week, if not next week, with the relevant Council officials to
3 have a plan of action in place so that we do not lose any more time on this. I think
4 inviting one representative from Bray and one representative from Greystones is
5 absolutely not enough. I think there should be two representatives -- I will be quite
6 blunt about it -- two representatives from the Friends of the Cliff Walk, two
7 representatives from among the bodies who actually do work on the Bray Head side
8 of the Cliff Walk on a regular basis as volunteers or people that are involved in the
9 Bray Head Committee, people who have a genuine interest as the Friends of the Cliff
10 Walk have. So there should be two of each as far as I'm concerned. And I'd also say
11 there were very, very strong speeches made at the meetings in Greystones, both
12 meetings, from business owners on the Greystones sides who have suffered huge
13 losses because of the lack of having the Cliff Walk available for consumers and
14 tourists to visit, so I would think there's a very strong case for a business person from
15 Bray and a business person from Greystones to be invited onto that committee. That
16 makes six from the outside. And I would say at the moment I think it's three or four
17 Councillors. That number of Councillors can be increased as well I think to any
18 Councillor from Bray or Greystones who wishes to be a member and wishes to
19 attend.

20
21 But I think what's also important -- so that's my proposal. I am proposing two from
22 the Friends of the Cliff Walk, two equivalent from Bray, and one business person
23 from each town. That's my proposal, Cathaoirleach. And any Councillor who
24 wishes to attend from the Bray or the Greystones Municipal District, so basically all
25 of the Members. They won't all be there. And additional Members may not be able
26 to make every meeting but I think it is important that we have a group of people who
27 are committed and interested. And I think that should happen ASAP. Not waiting
28 now for another month until January before we decide who are we going to put on it.
29 I want to get this thing moving.

30
31 I am sorry for going on, Cathaoirleach, but the final point I want to make is it's great
32 news according to what the Tánaiste has said, he's accepted the thing and we're
33 getting the go ahead to appoint a consultant. I want to ask the Chief Executive
34 directly: We say this could cost up to 10 million, has the Tánaiste committed to

1 providing the Council with whatever is needed to actually get the work done and get
2 the Cliff Walk open? Because appointing a consultant is just a very small first step.
3 And if he has committed to that, what department is going to be signing the cheques?
4 Because he was very vague in his statement on that, and we need to know and be
5 sure that once this work starts it will be completed speedily so that the Cliff Walk
6 will be open for everybody's use as soon as humanly possible. Thank you,
7 Cathaoirleach.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. We have had a proposal from Councillor Fortune
9 on two members from each side and to increase the Council representation. Have
10 you a seconder for your proposal?

11 COUNCILLOR FINN: I would like to second Joe Behan's proposal.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin.

13 MS PURCELL: The first one was Councillor Doyle.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, the first one was Councillor Doyle. Have you a
15 seconder for your proposal then, Councillor Doyle? For one member? Councillor
16 Stephen Stokes. I am going to go back now to Councillor Orla Finn. Actually sorry,
17 I am going to bring the Chief Executive in first just to clarify some of those queries.

18 MS O'GORMAN: Just on the matters raised to answer some of the questions.

19 Councillor Fortune, you asked about Irish Rail, and yeah, just to address that. So
20 Irish Rail are members of the task force, and they're very engaged. We have worked
21 very collaboratively with Irish Rail over the years, as you know, on many projects,
22 including the ECRIPP project. What they intimated at the meeting with the Tánaiste
23 was that they have sufficient windows in their scheduling of works for the rail line
24 that they will be able to facilitate any works that need to happen by Wicklow County
25 Council or other agents, or them directly, subject to their own funding being made
26 available, they're to fund elements of it.

27
28 To answer Councillor Behan's question about the funding, the Tánaiste committed
29 that the Government would find funding whatever it may be. I don't think there is a
30 dedicated line of funding as yet. It may come from a number of different sources but
31 we don't know I suppose the quantum of what is expected until we've done the next
32 phase, which is that immediate appointment of subject-matter expert to progress the
33 project along.

34

1 I might get Jackie just to confirm the timelines on that element of work which is to
2 commence immediately.

3 MS CARROLL: Thanks, Chief Executive. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, as the
4 Chief Executive said, now that we have that certainty and that clarity around the
5 funding piece we can progress to the next stage, and that everyone has accepted the
6 RPS report, all the stakeholders involved have accepted it. So we're now progressing
7 the appointment of subject-matter expert to take the project to the next stage and
8 through to completion. That will entail scoping of the works from the Bray side, the
9 unstable slopes, surveying the additional slopes, designing remediation measures
10 there. And on the Greystones side, to carry out the options assessment for the
11 rerouting and further survey of unstable slopes and rock faces. We're hoping to have
12 the initial scope of works prepared in the next three to four weeks. So that's our first
13 timeline that we're going to achieve. We've already agreed the scope to be written up
14 with the subject-matter expert. And following that then we will be looking at
15 preliminary design, subject to, there's a whole process we have to go through to do
16 our due diligence and due process thereafter. So we're confident that we will be able
17 to progress at speed now that we have the certainty around funding.

18
19 I would like to reiterate on, it was mentioned by some of the Members there about
20 the safety aspect and it is one thing that I am always banging on about. The RPS
21 report which has been accepted in its entirety by all the stakeholders and all the
22 interested groups out there has identified serious instability on the walk, and I think it
23 is important that any time we speak about the Cliff Walk and walking on the Cliff
24 Walk that we emphasise that safety piece. It states: "The major criteria that the Cliff
25 Walk doesn't meet is safety. The hazard risk assessment carried out identified seven
26 sections of the Cliff Walk to pose an unacceptable hazard risk." And I think it is
27 important that all the Members who received that report from RPS and were in the
28 room with me at the time will actually emphasise that and make sure that that's part
29 of the narrative that's out there.

30

31 So we will continue here to progress with the subject-matter expert piece and we will
32 keep you posted as things progress on that. Thank you.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I am going to get Helen to clarify something.

34 MS PURCELL: Sorry, can I just clarify, Councillor Doyle, did you mean to put that

1 in? Is it a proposal that there is one rep from Bray community and one rep from
2 Greystones community?

3 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: So what I was stating I suppose is that -- I suppose I
4 wasn't making a proposal per se in that I was repeating, I was just stating what had
5 happened during our discussion of updating the terms of reference. Now, I am not
6 sure what the process is in terms of the terms of reference for the committee, but it
7 was certainly discussed that we should have more input from the community in the
8 forms of additional members. So I suppose that was the initial conversation. I mean
9 there's been additional proposals since, I don't know, does it go back to the
10 committee to adopt? I'm not sure.

11 MS O'GORMAN: I think, Members, if there are proposals on the floor here
12 Members can vote on the proposals and then the terms of reference get drafted
13 around that. But what I would say, I have no issue with whatever the Members
14 decide, and you know external stakeholders are certainly welcome to form part of
15 that committee, but I would say that the elected representative voice has to be
16 commensurate with those non-Elected Members of the committee, and how that
17 works its way out I suppose we can take it back to the existing Members or to the
18 two Municipal Districts. But I do think that if we are in a situation where we have
19 six stakeholders from outside the elected body that as a minimum there needs to be a
20 commensurate number of Councillors represented.

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Orla Finn.

22 COUNCILLOR FINN: Thanks very much. Thank you to everybody who has
23 spoken so far. First of all, I'd like to say that I very much agree with Councillor Joe
24 Behan in relation to who should be on the -- or should be included in the new Cliff
25 Walk Implementation Committee, so I would like to second Joe's suggestions please,
26 or proposals I should say.

27

28 Personally I suppose I worry when I hear sentences like "have not decided on who
29 that should be yet", "move it along" and "in the future". And I personally feel the
30 future is now and I think it would have been great if the Cliff Walk Management
31 Committee had come here today with more of a firm proposal. I do think that we
32 need other groups involved in the new expanded committee and I would also like to
33 see a representative from the Friends of the Cliff Walk and also somebody from the
34 Bray side, as Joe said. I think really we need to get on with this and, you know, not

1 next month or the following month, but that really there needs to be talks,
2 discussions and proposals put forward as soon as possible and then followed up and
3 implemented. Thank you.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

5 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. God bless anyone
6 who wants to be on a committee. I don't know where that emerges from. But this is
7 interesting territory I think. And yeah, there's very fundamental questions for me.
8 There's how much money is on the table? That's already been flagged. That's again
9 a very literal and fundamental element of this. All the aspirations and notions in the
10 world will not open one metre of the Cliff Walk. Action will open various metres of
11 the Cliff Walk but that needs to be resourced. So in my mind it's resource, resource,
12 resource. And again, fair play to the Tánaiste because he got inside my head and he's
13 been running around in there with this proposal when he talks about an
14 implementation group. And in my mind I am sitting there thinking about, well, what
15 does that mean? What is that in real terms? And who is that? But also I'm thinking,
16 yeah, that's a very professional statutory functional type of domain where there's
17 procurement, contractor oversight, rail interface, protocols, environmental
18 compliance, legal responsibility, geotechnical engineering, full-time project
19 management, interagency coordination, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, Cathaoirleach.
20 And that is the means by which the Cliff Walk gets resolved in the short-term and
21 long-term.

22

23 And one huge thing for me, and maybe the Chief Executive again can confirm this
24 because this is our reality as a Local Authority, is that the very recent also note from
25 Government is that we need to increase our housing supply and there is a very
26 dramatic and concrete expectation about us doing that as a Local Authority, and that
27 also requires a how. How do we do that? So how do we do both of these things if
28 there isn't money on the table, if there isn't extra resources? I dare say colleagues
29 across the other Municipal Districts will be saying, sorry, the engineers are working
30 on the Cliff Walk, are they? The planning team are on the Cliff Walk, are they? The
31 active travel is now giving attention to the Cliff Walk, is it? And they'll be
32 wondering why stuff isn't happening in their area. So we have to again -- the
33 previous conversation was about at what cost when the biodiversity action is being
34 taken, and this is also very real. Because it's the same pool of staff in my mind,

1 unless I'm corrected. Again, God bless the consultant, the one, who might be
2 appointed to do something in this domain. But the real action requires real
3 resources. And if we have to divert resources to achieve this then somebody's going
4 to have to back up what's being diverted. And to me, that's the job of the State. If
5 the State wants us to deliver then it's got to put the money on the table, give the
6 resources that are required. The 17th -- to me, you're talking to me a million euro to
7 get it open by the 17th of March. And is that sitting somewhere ready to be
8 allocated? And all the processes, again as the Director said, we don't get to skip a lot
9 of that stuff. We can intensify, and I'm sure that's possible, but nothing -- and I don't
10 want to be the begrudger here but nothing happens without resources because that's
11 the momentum that's required. Thank you.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin.

13 COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I do
14 welcome the confirmation from the Tánaiste and thank you to the Chief Executive
15 for all her work. I know it's been a lot with the task force. I do agree with my
16 colleagues quite a lot. First of all, we want the Cliff Walk open and that we're in
17 favour of extending the committee. And I support Councillor Fortune. But in
18 reflection on what Councillor Behan has said regarding maybe bringing a member of
19 the business community in, maybe we should look at that and that may very well be
20 a good idea. I do commend the Friends of the Cliff Walk on the work that they have
21 done even though safety issue is a major concern for us, but they have given their all
22 to it and they have to be commended for the support that they have given to the
23 whole community.

24

25 The one thing that I would say about the Management Committee going forward is
26 that I would be very strong for both sides, Bray and Greystones, that all elected
27 representatives would be involved in it, and that the work of the Management
28 Committee would be seen very strongly with a strong link with the Council
29 Management Team, that it doesn't end up just happening as a meeting to have a
30 meeting. That it's productive and it happens timely in order to move this on.
31 Because sometimes meetings happen to have a meeting and if that happens we won't
32 have the Cliff Walk open. So if we're having these meetings I'd like to see that
33 they're productive, that we help the Council officials from a Management Committee
34 meeting and that the terms of reference are spot on so as that it can be productive to

1 get this Cliff Walk open and that the short-term is hopefully productive as well. So I
2 will support us working away on the Management Committee as best we can with
3 everyone. Thank you.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Lourda Scott.

5 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. I think many of my points
6 that I was going to say have probably already been made. I feel at this rate if I had a
7 euro for every time I have been asked about the Cliff Walk and when it's going to
8 open and the possibility of it being opened in the short-term I'd probably have ten
9 million pounds myself to fund it. Look, I would certainly welcome the presence of
10 community groups on the committee. In terms of how many or indeed adding
11 representation to the business side, while I think it is a good idea in theory I would
12 perhaps be guided by the current Members of the Management Committee as to how
13 workable the committee will be in achieving its aims with an expanded committee.
14 Because I think we have all sat on committees that are maybe too large with sort of
15 too much talk of meetings as Councillor Fenelon alluded to but the actual work
16 doesn't get done. So I would sort of, you know, ask for people to bear that in mind.

17

18 There's an urgency in this. I think we do need to make a decision today, set it up and
19 start getting the work done. I see the Tánaiste did make note of an ambition to have
20 a short-term opening of the walk by March next year. And certainly I was actually
21 looking back on notes I made through an MD meeting literally this month last year
22 and we were making the same ask in our Greystones MD, and I am sure the same
23 conversation was being had at the Bray MD. So it is in some way disappointing that
24 12 months later we're talking about the same thing. I would love for this newly
25 reconfigured committee to meet and in conjunction with the task force, whatever it
26 takes, and actually get a decision and action to have our Cliff Walk open by March
27 of next year. Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Paul O'Brien.

29 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I will be as brief as I
30 can because. This is the first time in six and a half years that I have been here that I
31 have spoken about another MD, but you won't be surprised to know it is because I
32 have an ulterior motive to be quite honest with you. I want to compliment the team
33 so far in bringing it this far, because it has been a bone of contention for a long time.
34 It's been discussed in this chamber, and I'm sure in the Bray and Greystones

1 chamber, for some time. I remember, I happened to be in the Chair at the time when
2 Councillor Erika Doyle put herself forward for the committee because she felt so
3 strongly for it, and I want to compliment her for her chairmanship so far, and I am
4 sure she will bring it to conclusion. But I want to thank everybody because it goes to
5 show you, this is my point, when you park politics you can get things done. When
6 you put your mind to it you can get things done.

7
8 That brings me to my point and my ulterior motive because maybe the Wicklow
9 Councillors have been too quiet, too polite, I don't know what other way to put it, but
10 we have a situation where we've had two presentations in the last year here about the
11 Murrough falling into the sea. We're now 60 feet from the railway tracks. I spoke to
12 Councillor Dunne last week about this and Councillor Richmond, and a few others.
13 Councillor Dunne and myself have families that hail from the Murrough. It means a
14 lot to us. Without adding another headache to the Chief Executive, but we've seen
15 what a task force can do, we've seen how much progress can be made, and therefore
16 I am calling for a task force for the Murrough, because as was explained to us by the
17 ECRIPP crew that gave us the two mentions, works aren't due to commence until
18 2030. By 2030 we're not going to have a Murrough. We're not going to have a
19 railway line let alone anything else.

20
21 I compliment Councillor Doyle and everyone involved in the Bray Cliff Walk, but if
22 we don't get action on the Murrough soon we're going to lose our only railway link
23 between Wicklow and Dublin. As we saw in Covid and going back generations, it's
24 recreation as well for us. As I said before many times, Councillor Dunne and
25 myself, it's in our blood now, it's in our DNA now in Wicklow, the Murrough, to lose
26 it is a shame.

27
28 I just want to put it on the record, and I will finish with this, and I tried to make it
29 quite clear in a social media post last week: This is not the responsibility of
30 Wicklow County Council, as in funding. This is going to require multiple times of
31 ten million. And I think we really need to get the Tánaiste and others on board in
32 terms of Wicklow, the Murrough, and what's required because if we don't we're
33 going to lose it. And the last thing I'll say is if we lose it shame on all of us because
34 it is coming to that day very soon. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I am going to bring in Councillor Malachai
2 Duddy online.

3 COUNCILLOR DUDDY: I would like to welcome any progress that is going to get
4 the Cliff Walk open as soon as possible. To support Councillor Behan's proposal, I
5 know Councillor Orla Finn has already seconded the motion, but I think the
6 participation of the Friends of the Cliff Walk is important and I would like to support
7 his proposal. In another aspect of it, in seeing the reopening of the Cliff Walk I
8 would hate to see that the users of the playing fields in Ballywaltrim might be
9 disadvantaged by the engineers in Bray being deployed on the Cliff Walk. So I think
10 it is vital that the Cliff Walk restoration and reopening as an urgent matter should not
11 take away resources from other areas. And as I say I'd agree with Councillor O'Brien
12 in that, and I would welcome his remarks in that regard. Go raibh maith agat
13 Cathaoirleach.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Tom Fortune.

15 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yeah, just in the interests of speeding things up, Chair.
16 My proposal is very similar to Councillor Behan's, and Councillor Behan's proposal
17 has an added section to it so I am going to withdraw my proposal in favour of
18 Councillor Behan's proposal. I think that's more productive all round, following the
19 discussion we've had.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. There's two other speakers and then we'll come
21 back to the Chief Executive. Councillor Gail Dunne.

22 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And first of all I'm delighted
23 with the progress that's happening between Bray and Greystones. I think a lot of
24 hard work has been done by the community and by politicians and not knowing
25 exactly everything that's going on in there but the sooner it's sorted out the better.

26

27 I want to support Councillor O'Brien on the Murrough. As he alluded to, our
28 families come from the Murrough and it's our heaven, that's where people go
29 walking, mental health, everything, to get themselves in good humour. And it does,
30 it's a great walk, it's a beautiful walk. But every time there's a storm more of it goes.
31 And it's getting worrying and worrying. And it's funny, the fact that we're on the
32 ground, the amount of people coming to us about the Murrough, like they are very
33 upset, and we seem to be banging against a wall. We all know it needs to be done.
34 From what I am led to believe the money's there, but we're waiting on climate action

1 reports or different things like that, biodiversity. Well, there's not going to be
2 anything to do with it in a few years' time because there'll be no Murrough so we
3 won't be worrying about that. And the only reason I believe that it hasn't been done
4 so far is because of that, because of report after report after report. And the
5 Murrough, we're losing it, losing it, losing it. And I suppose when it starts to get
6 towards the rail line something eventually will be done but there'll be nothing left. I
7 support Councillor O'Brien and his motion. I think we need to have a look at
8 ourselves in Wicklow Town in our district and we need to start -- we had the TDs
9 down a couple of weeks ago and we told them the problems in Wicklow Town, and
10 not one of them -- they went on about the courthouse, about the DART, but not one
11 of them has gone out about the Murrough, and that's one of the most important things
12 in our town and it'd be terrible if we lost it. And shame on us, as Paul said, it would
13 be terrible, and us living locally it would be terrible. Thank you.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Ned Whelan.

15 COUNCILLOR WHELAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I think it is great that
16 everyone has accepted the RPS report recommendations and is committed to
17 implementing them fast. I think the Tánaiste and the Government I think are
18 committed to making sure there's funding available for the expert team needed to
19 turn the report into a long-term sustainable action plan. And I think everyone needs
20 to pull together to deliver on this amenity for Bray and Greystones and we need to
21 focus now on immediate measures to open the walk as soon as possible and maybe
22 the first part of it by March. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Caroline Winstanley.

24 COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I suppose all I wanted
25 to add is just to acknowledge why originally that group was set up. That it was about
26 the tourism of Bray Head. So, like, we have had a huge change I suppose in need for
27 that group. I totally support that we need to grow the membership of that group.
28 The only thing I'd like to add is that in that terms of reference I find it kind of
29 limiting if we're talking about we should have two here, two here, and that there
30 should be some flexibility within the terms of the group that if we have a change in
31 leader we need expertise, that there should be that flexibility within that we can bring
32 in different groups of people. Because if we get too rigid about it now we might
33 paint ourselves in a corner, and that we should be able to be a bit more dynamic as
34 maybe the needs develop as the project goes on. I would like that flexibility to be

1 within the group that they can invite other people to join if they have an expertise
2 need. So I don't want it to be too kind of restrictive. Thank you.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Mark Barry online.

4 COUNCILLOR BARRY: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. I would like to add
5 I welcome the task force progression. I think it is a very positive move, in particular
6 the commitment of funding to the task force by the Tánaiste. I'd like to thank the
7 Bray engineers for all the work they've done to date as well. I think it's remarkable
8 the amount of work they have put in also and it needs to be recognised. I welcome
9 the expansion of the Cliff Walk Committee to include local groups. And I also agree
10 with Councillor Fortune that any local representative that wishes to attend should be
11 facilitated. Thank you.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. And Councillor Erika Doyle.

13 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just very briefly, just two
14 responses there to say that, you know, we had discussed the necessity of having inter
15 alia members that can attend if and when needed, that it may not be necessary for
16 them and just out of their respect for their time to be there all the time but that we
17 can bring them in if and when needed. And just one more response about appearing
18 today without suggestions for who certain members should be. I don't think it would
19 be appropriate for me to mention specific names, particularly on the Bray side of
20 people that haven't been consulted or discussed or put themselves forward or
21 nominated in any way to mentioning specific names. There is an obvious
22 representative body on the Greystones side, there isn't such a thing on the Bray side.
23 It doesn't mean work hasn't be done or discussion hasn't taken place, it has. It just
24 means it would not be appropriate for me to name individuals at this juncture. Thank
25 you, Cathaoirleach.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I am going to go back to the Chief Executive
27 now.

28 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Members. So correct
29 me if I am wrong, I think I am reading it right: The suggestion is that there's three
30 from the Greystones side, two and three from Bray to include members of the
31 Friends of the Cliff Walk and representatives from the community in Bray plus
32 business associations. That's all fine, as I said. And Councillor O'Brien's point,
33 Dermot O'Brien's point about the governance and oversight and implementation.
34 The statutory role, procurement, the legal responsibility all sits with me

1 unfortunately, the health and safety risk and all of that with the Local Authority.
2 And there is an impetus there now because funding has been provided and
3 committed to for the lifetime of the project. And to say as well, I mean we will work
4 towards a short-term solution but it is dependent on other bodies being open to those
5 suggestions, and we will work with those stakeholders in that regard. We talked
6 about this at the task force, about the need for a collaborative work approach across
7 all the stakeholders that have an interest in the cliff head. So we will certainly
8 proceed on that basis. So we are going to take a twin-track approach I suppose on it.

9

10 The terms of reference. There's a draft terms of reference that has been prepared by
11 the existing Cliff Walk Management Committee, that can be certainly amended to
12 reflect the expanded membership as proposed, if that is agreed by the Members, and
13 that work can commence straight away. What I would suggest is that for the Bray
14 side and for the business reps that that goes back to the MDs for them to consider
15 who is the most appropriate bodies to invite on and to progress that at speed.

16

17 The one thing I would say is that this is a committee of the Council so therefore the
18 voices of the elected reps have to be represented. The representatives have to be
19 commensurate to those other non-elected stakeholders.

20

21 I don't know if Jackie if there's anything else you want to add?

22 MS CARROLL: Thanks, Chief. Yeah, when we were discussing the terms of
23 reference we discussed them in light of this item on the agenda and the outcome of
24 the determination of this item on the agenda. So I know from speaking with the
25 Chair, Councillor Doyle and other Members of the committee that obviously we're
26 open to this whole inclusive piece. As I say, the Greystones side, particular names
27 have been mentioned for that nomination process. On the Bray side we could
28 probably have a discussion about that at our meeting tomorrow night. Under AOB
29 we could discuss around that. So I think we're happy to accede to that request.

30 MS O'GORMAN: And just on the resources, I know questions were asked about the
31 resources and will it pull away from Ballywaltrim pitches and other areas. Jackie is
32 the lead as the point of contact obviously for the Management Team on it in
33 collaboration with Helena on the Greystones side of things. The whole point of
34 appointing the consultant engineering firm is that they will have a suite of resources

1 and services to bring to bear. I would imagine and I would expect our engineering
2 resources to remain in situ in the districts to work on district works but to have an
3 advisory capacity. Because to be fair to the engineers in both districts they do know
4 the area very, very well. So they will be in an advisory capacity. I am also working
5 with Jackie just looking on additional resources that may be needed to supplement
6 the team but it won't take away from the existing work in the districts.

7
8 Then on the point, on the Murrough, Councillor O'Brien, I hear what you're doing.
9 We will certainly take it away and come back and have a talk via the district with
10 yourselves and Councillor Dunne on that. Thank you.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. So the proposal as it stands is
12 two members from umbrella bodies of either side and one member from the business
13 community of either side and increasing the Councillor representation.

14 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Is that agreed? That has been proposed and it has been
16 seconded. Any dissent?

17 MS O'GORMAN: Agreed?

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: No. Then we're all agreed. So we don't need to go to a vote.

19 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Members. The next item then is: "To consider
21 the Chief Executive's Monthly Management Report." So as it is now 25 to five we
22 unfortunately cannot have a time extension, so I am just reminding the Members of
23 that. We have our civic reception at five o'clock which I am hoping you will all join
24 us for. So I am going to take questions three at a time, and if we don't get to cover
25 all the questions I will ask you to email them into Teresa and a response will be
26 given.

27

28 So the first is Councillor Pat Kennedy

29 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Chief Executive,
30 for the comprehensive report that you give us each month. I suppose, Chief
31 Executive, my question, and I could be putting you on the spot here a little bit
32 maybe, but in the 2023 ORIS Scheme that was announced on the 2nd of April 2024,
33 150 outdoor projects were announced in the country, and the Baravore car park was
34 one of those. And there's a grand little picture in the Chief Executive's Report of the

1 upgrade works that has been carried out up there. And if you read the report it says:
2 "Car park upgrade works completed and fencing being completed during November
3 20 --" Just gone, right? Up to the 30th of November. And I have been involved in
4 this project, Chief Executive, since the very, very beginning, and we all know in this
5 chamber the problems we have in Glenmalure with car parking over a great number
6 of years. I have to commend our own manager, the Gardaí, Coillte, the residents,
7 and myself was involved, in working up there to resolve this. And while Wicklow
8 County Council do own a piece of land up there and we did receive 195,000 back in
9 2024 under that scheme, that 2023 scheme, and now I see that that it reads almost as
10 if everything is completed. So I have a number of questions for you, Chief
11 Executive, and maybe you could answer them, and maybe you don't know the
12 answer to this today but that's fine too. How much is left of that grant? Is there any
13 fear -- if there is money left, is there any fear that we will lose the remainder of that
14 grant? And will you make sure that this project, if the funding is still there, is
15 completed in 2026? And I would also like for this to be continually shown in the
16 Chief Executive's Report each month going forward until it's done. Thanks,
17 Cathaoirleach.

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Peter Stapleton.

19 COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I have a quick request to
20 the roads and transport department that they write to landowners on the R747 to
21 remind them of their obligations to keep hedges on their property cut. I have
22 received several reps over the last number of months from particularly hauliers but
23 also just normal drivers of the state of the hedges and overgrown trees on that road,
24 and it has been about six or seven years since landowners have got notices. So if we
25 could send out notices that'd be great. Then also just to request an update on the
26 interaction between the lighting team in the Council and the ESB. There's a number
27 of lights that are out in Tinahely and Coolafancy for over a year, and they have been
28 lodged with the ESB and I believe that the Wicklow County Council team is really
29 pushing the ESB and working hard with them to try and get them to address the
30 faults, but alas nothing has happened. So if we could get a general update on that it
31 would be brilliant. Thank you.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Stephen Stokes.

33 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach. Just three things for
34 me. Firstly, just in relation to the parking bye-law review, at the last Transport SPC

1 we were advised that this would commence in Quarter 1 in 2026, however we are
2 awaiting on the details to be confirmed by the Chief Executive. So I just want to see
3 if we are further along. I do appreciate that it is a significant body of work but the
4 last review was in 2017. The second thing is in relation to the Chapel Road in the
5 Greystones Municipal District. It's undergoing significant work, which is very
6 welcome, however the relatively new L3 bus is on a diversion route at the northern
7 section on a much narrower part of Chapel Road, close to St Killian's Church on
8 Blacklyon, it then loops onto Blacklyon Manor Road, but the challenge is that the L3
9 bus is very wide and I have been advised that many passing vehicles have been
10 forced onto the footpath and this is exacerbated when it meets a truck or other
11 vehicle. Do we know what level of input Wicklow County Council had into the
12 approval of this diversion? And, is there an alternative arrangement that can be
13 found? Because I believe this is going to go on potentially until April of 2026, and I
14 am getting quite a lot of correspondence from residents. And then just finally, I
15 noticed on the Wicklow County Council website that my email and some other
16 Councillors' email addresses were changed to Wicklow County Council email
17 addresses, and I understand that we have an IT security policy and that the Council
18 want us to write using our Council email, you know, and additionally that's where we
19 get our Council updates and our meeting agendas, and that's all fine. But the
20 challenge is when constituents email me and other Councillors they may send large
21 photos or videos, but even without those items some emails end up in quarantine or I
22 don't seem to get them at all. So therefore it impedes the service that I can offer to
23 the community, and it is why I use Gmail when I liaise with constituents. And
24 therefore my request is simple: Can Councillors just choose the email address listed
25 on the Wicklow County Council website for members of the public to contact us?
26 Go raibh maith agat.

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Chief Executive, do you want to come in on
28 those three queries?

29 MS O'GORMAN: Yes. Thank you. Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you,
30 Members. Councillor Kennedy, yeah, the funding is still there for that project. I
31 think it has in the region of €158,000 left in it. It won't be lost. It is in our
32 programme of works to be completed in 2026 and we will keep it in the CE report as
33 requested.

34

1 Councillor Stapleton, I might ask Joe to come in on the issues that you have raised
2 around hedge cutting and public lighting.

3

4 Councillor Stokes, on the bye-laws. They will be commenced in quarter 1 next year.
5 They are going to be led by Jackie's team in Bray because that's where the
6 responsibility sits. And I will get Joe to comment as well on the diversion of the
7 Chapel Road, I don't know if you can add anything to that. And Brian might just
8 comment on the IT security issues.

9 MR LANE: Okay. First of all, regarding the R747, yeah, if you give us a specific
10 email we will target and take a look at those for you. Regarding the public lights,
11 yeah, it is not just Tinahely, there's still a number of public lights, they're more
12 complicated than the easier solutions. We have a new resource in the form of a
13 public lights inspector, and that job will be to liaise particularly with the ESB
14 regarding some of the more difficult areas. But there is a hard percentage of the
15 public lights that last year were not fixed that require the ESB input. So we have a
16 resource gone into that. Regarding the Chapel Road, yeah, the statutory consultation
17 regarding road closure went through, we're on top of that. The L3 bus route was
18 selected by Go Ahead Ireland in consultation with the contractor's traffic
19 management team. That's the only route that's available I believe.

20 COUNCILLOR STOKES: I disagree. We can have a chat.

21 MR GLEESON: Councillor, just in relation to the emails. As you will be aware,
22 Helen sent out an email back in October outlining the reasons that we're sending
23 correspondence now to official Wicklow County Council email addresses. And just
24 to I suppose flag back in September there was a cyber security training put forward
25 for the Elected Members, and those who couldn't attend got an email with the link
26 outlining all the risks. Unfortunately we are in a world at the moment where there's
27 huge amount of cyber security risks that we're facing, and I suppose we have to make
28 sure that we're not exposing both the Council, the entity itself, plus yourselves as
29 individual Councillors. Due to the requirements for cyber security, and as also
30 linked in with our IPB cyber security policy, there's a number of things we have to
31 do. We have to complete a questionnaire with IPB, over 200 questions, and one of
32 them there's a section on emails and how we manage our emails. We cannot manage
33 non-Local Authority emails. Any private personal emails we can't control. We can't
34 shut it down. We can't monitor activities. So it's a huge exposure to us as a Local

1 Authority and I suppose the last thing we want is an incident that the HSE or the
2 Munster Technological University incurred there a few years ago. So unfortunately
3 we couldn't promote the use of non-Council emails on our own website. But look, in
4 relation to quarantining emails there is an option on the email to contact our IS
5 department to get them released. I know it can be frustrating but unfortunately we
6 have to put the high risk -- and that is what it is, it is a major high risk, in relation to
7 cyber security, we have to put that first and foremost. Unfortunately, we have to
8 leave it at the official email addresses on the website. Okay. Thank you.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Peir Leonard.

10 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks. Just on that, like I mean that's back to my
11 point again. I think software and an app is the way to go for representations going
12 forward. It would be an in-house secure system rather than email. Because it is very
13 inefficient when you're receiving emails on one email and then having to copy and
14 paste them over onto another email, and it is the efficiency of it when you're already
15 busy and poorly paid and worked to the bone. So just my reps, just for Arklow.
16 There's a lighting issue on the southern -- and I know it's been flagged and logged on
17 the system, but the Wexford Road and the Dublin Road are both in darkness and it is
18 very dangerous, and I don't know whether it can be escalated. I didn't want to come
19 in on the Greystones to Bray Cliff Walk but there is -- and I brought it up at the local
20 MD meeting, and I know there is the study that's complete now, but there's a serious
21 issue with the coastal erosion from Arklow Town. We can't even get onto the
22 beaches. Clogher is very bad there and the houses are in jeopardy there. There's a
23 small cluster of houses there right on the beach. I have asked numerous times for
24 someone just to meet, and I have sent on the numbers. Like, that is urgent, and those
25 people need to be met. There is a business there. There's a substantial business
26 there. They need to be spoken to. They just want that communication to be opened
27 up. Most recently with the recent storm there was substantial damage done at a jetty
28 at Roadstone. I would like an update on that. I think it's a very serious issue. You
29 know, we can see the coastal erosional damage in businesses and infrastructure now,
30 and I would like an update on what's being done with that because there's a lot of sea
31 swimmers that swim in the cove there and with this recent storm as well the waves
32 went actually over the road where the car park is, you know, so if there is stuff in the
33 water there that's a danger as well. And then just lastly back again to danger, like our
34 Main Street that Kitty's building, just an update on the CPO, the 56 Main Street.

1 Like, there's loose slates on the roof of that and if one of those came down on God
2 forbid somebody walking up the street, I just think something more seriously needs
3 to be done to mitigate that building there. I know there are ongoing liaisons with the
4 Council and the regeneration officer, but that building is gone beyond being derelict.
5 There's actually a day-to-day danger on the Main Street. And I think the roof needs
6 to be removed or at least the slates need to be taken off it. Just an update on that
7 CPO. And then the An Taisce's report. I know you say in the Chief Executive's
8 Report that there's a review. I am just wondering what scope -- what course of action
9 is going to come from that review. What is it going to consist of? Are they going to
10 contact each individual property owner that was on that review? And what course of
11 action? And can we look at maybe some sort of activation incentives for the ones
12 that aren't completely derelict to get people in them into the shops and look at
13 meanwhile use? I am going to bring it up with the Economic SPC as well. Thank
14 you.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Warren O'Toole.

16 COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. This is just in relation to the
17 South Quay in Arklow. The recent storms deposited a lot of debris into the South
18 Quay and restricted a lot of boat access. The sluice gate, today I was going to bring
19 it up but I have been informed that this morning there was a teleporter down there
20 that lifted the sluice gate. There was a motor on this originally and it was removed
21 for some reason so all the debris is getting caught in that corner that naturally flowed
22 out. So can somebody look at that to get the mechanical device placed back on it?
23 Also the lockup for the waste disposal down at the quay where the skip is, it's only
24 open on a Tuesday morning at 11 o'clock and that's generally when all the fishermen
25 are out there. Can this be changed to suit the needs of the fishermen? The newly
26 installed toilets down there, could we have an update on that, when they're going to
27 be opened? Also, can we have an update on the water sitting at the entrance to the
28 toilets? Because it's sitting there it's the only place on the quay that the water sits
29 there, so now there's mud that also gets deposited there, so people when they do open
30 won't be able to use it properly. And then lastly, and I know this is a matter that was
31 raised by some of my colleagues down there in Arklow regarding the bait fridge
32 back in '23. That hasn't been used for -- I don't think it was ever used by the story
33 that I am getting, and I think it could be installed upwards of eight years ago. Could
34 we get a costing on how much that fridge was, and if anything could be done about

1 the door? Because the mechanism inside the door isn't suitable in case somebody got
2 locked in there. So can something be done about that? There's fishermen especially
3 this time with all the boats being boxed in they can't get out so they're losing bait, so
4 it's €120 per day that they're losing without the means of the fridge. Thanks.

5 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Patsy Glennon.

6 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just to follow on from
7 what Councillor Kennedy said. Car parking is a problem in the village of Hollywood
8 as well, particularly at the weekends, you can hardly drive through it with cars. And
9 the park and ride that was promised for West Wicklow. While the bus stops are
10 reaching completion, and I was speaking to John Bowes today, and he tells me that
11 they will be finished in January, I am wondering is there any progress on getting a
12 park and ride facility so those bus stops can be brought to full potential? I see on the
13 Wicklow Times today: "TD taken a renewed interest in the N81 safety." And I
14 would like to thank the Chief Executive for taking it up with the Tánaiste because in
15 that article it is confirmed that you have spoken to the Tánaiste, and I look forward to
16 significant progress being made on those safety issues which are still outstanding. It
17 is also the subject of an EMRA report and submissions going before that board in the
18 coming days. Finally, I'd like to thank Joe Lane for having commenced work on a
19 dangerous, demolished bridge as you enter from County Wicklow into County
20 Kildare. It is not complete yet but I'm assured it will be completed. And it has much
21 improved the driving conditions for that area. Thank you.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Do you want to come in, Chief Executive, on
23 those three queries?

24 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Members. Councillor
25 Leonard, yeah, just on the reps system, it is part of our programme of work with
26 Leonora's team and corporate to look at a proper reps system that is trackable,
27 traceable, tracks commitments, the whole lot, because what we have at the moment
28 doesn't function in the way I would like it to work, and we would certainly like to
29 make your lives easier for making reps so that you are not dependent on email the
30 whole time. Joe might come in on the Wexford Road and the Dublin Road, the
31 lighting issues. Just in relation to the coastal erosion, we will certainly set up a
32 meeting with the Clogher residents. We can do that. No problem at all. The jetty is
33 owned by Roadstone and they are working on it I am led to believe. We will see if
34 we can get an update directly from them on that for you. On the Main Street

1 dereliction and An Taisce report, under Helena's team there is a dedicated unit there
2 looking at activation of sites and all of that in tandem with the town regeneration. I
3 would agree with you that we have gone beyond the softly-softly approach
4 particularly in a town as important as Arklow and just the amount of unused space on
5 the Main Street, it's not a position that we want to be in, so we are working on that.
6 Councillor O'Toole, I might get Teresa to come in on the various issues around the
7 debris and sluice gates and the bait fridge, and then the toilets on that. And,
8 Councillor Glennon, I will get Joe to come in on the car parking and the park and
9 ride for West Wicklow. Yeah, to be fair, the Tánaiste was quite receptive to talks
10 about it N81 and committed to, you know, putting as much emphasis on that as there
11 are on other parts of the county. And just to update, I did get a response from TII
12 about a meeting, they're looking for agenda items, so I will go back to them on that
13 and hopefully we will get a date scheduled in the new year for that. I will go to
14 Teresa first on the Arklow issues and then to Joe. Thank you.

15 MS CARROLL: Thanks, Chief Executive. With regard to the fridge, the bait fridge,
16 we did look maybe 12 to 18 months ago for an expression of interest for somebody
17 to look after that, to run it for us, but we got no interest. With regard to the toilets,
18 it's a matter of resources really just to manage them. So we are looking into that.
19 And with regard to the last item you brought up was the debris at the dock, yeah, the
20 technical staff are looking into that as well. But to be fair, Councillor O'Toole,
21 there's a lot of issues there so maybe it might be worthwhile for you to sit down with
22 our engineer who deals with the harbours as well and go through those one-by-one. I
23 think I have got them all there but just in case.

24 MR LANE: As regards the public lighting, you might give me the exact location.
25 There are a number where we are liaising with the ESB, I am not quite sure if that is
26 the one. Yeah, just give it me and I'll get a report on it. Again we have a new
27 resource and it'll be one thing they'll be interested in trying to build up a relationship,
28 so absolutely no problem, give me that. Again, any other ones taking longer, send
29 them, and I will have an interest in them. As regards the parking, as I said the last
30 day, that's not strategic, as in, it's not TII-funded at the moment and on the list of the
31 ones that they were pushing forward. However, a suitable site for park and ride is
32 being negotiated by the Municipal District for one. So that is being looked at at a
33 local level. As regards the bridge, I was under the impression it was finished, but we
34 will take a look at that.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: So, Members, we only have three minutes left which I don't
2 feel there is time for any more questions, so I would ask you -- and I apologise but I
3 am going to ask you to email in your questions. I know we spent a lot of time on the
4 Cliff Walk, and I think that was very important and it was important that everybody
5 had their say on that. So I apologise that we don't have more time, but I just --

6 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Cathaoirleach, I'll get mine in within the three minutes.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: We still have correspondence. Helen has to read out
8 correspondence, Councillor O'Neill. So I do apologise.

9 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: It's a long way to come and not to be able to get your
10 questions in here for the sake of a few minutes here or there, you know, across the
11 Sally Gap and then the last minute -- we heard all about East Wicklow, all day today.
12 There's few issues. One of the issues I had was in East Wicklow so that may be of
13 interest. It's a pity there's no facility in place that a lad could get a few words in
14 about the top of the mountains.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: I know, but I have six -- unfortunately, Councillor O'Neill, I
16 have about six or seven people looking to come in, so I can't just allow one. I have
17 apologised. I did explain that I felt it was very necessary that we gave due time to
18 the Cliff Walk, and there is correspondence that Helen has to read out. So I will go
19 ahead to Helen.

20 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Maybe we need to look at this again, that Councillors,
21 there's plenty of Councillors there that had a lot of issues and questions and they're
22 not getting their spoke in.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Absolutely. Every question and every Councillor that has
24 indicated they want to speak is as important as the other, but unfortunately we we've
25 just run out of time.

26 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Yeah.

27 MS PURCELL: Just to proceed with the correspondence, I have a number of items.
28 Two items were circulated to the Councillors in the last week. The Commission for
29 Regulation of Utilities have launched public consultation on Uisce Eireann's Draft
30 Capital Investment Plan for 2025-2029. That's open for the next nine weeks. And
31 there's also public consultation on our rural future, which is from the "Rural
32 Development Policy: Our Rural Future," and that's open until the 12th of December
33 2025. I'd also like to remind the Members that I've circulated information on the
34 security allowance for the Elected Members. If any of you have receipts if you could

1 get them into us in the next week it would be very much appreciated. I also want to
2 note the circulation of CPG minutes from the 13th January, 10th February, 7th April,
3 12th May, 9th June, 1st September and the 6th October. I would like to wish the
4 Members a very happy Christmas and to remind you that the Council meeting in
5 January is on the 12th of January. I don't want any you've turning up a week early.
6 Thank you very much. We would appreciate it if you could stay for the Lara
7 Gillespie reception which is going to occur now. Thank you very much.
8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Members. I would also like to wish you all a very
9 happy and safe Christmas. Thank you.

10
11 (Meeting concluded at 4:59pm)

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