

ORDINARY MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN
AND VIA TEAMS
ON
MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2024 AT 2:00 PM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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1 PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY 2024, AT
2 2:00PM AS FOLLOWS:

3

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, members, I think we'll make a start, if that's okay. So
5 Helen, I will hand over to yourself for the roll call.

6

7 MS PURCELL: So we'll just go with the roll call now. As usual, we are a hybrid
8 meeting. If there are any issues with the technology, can you let me know? We ask
9 the members to keep their cameras on, and the members of the public and staff to
10 keep their cameras off. Thank you very much.

11

12 Councillor Tom Annesley?

13 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Present.

14 MS PURCELL: Councillor Mark Barry? I can see you there, Councillor Barry.
15 Present?

16 COUNCILLOR BARRY: Present.

17 MS PURCELL: Thanks. Councillor Joe Behan?

18 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

19 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Vincent Blake?

20 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Present.

21 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

22 COUNCILLOR BOURKE: (No audible reply.)

23 MS PURCELL: Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

24 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

25 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

26 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

27 MS PURCELL: Councillor Shay Cullen?

28 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Present.

29 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Erika Doyle?

30 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Present.

31 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gail Dunne?

32 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

33 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Anne Ferris?

34 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Present.

- 1 MS PURCELL: Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?
- 2 COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.
- 3 MS PURCELL: Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy?
- 4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.
- 5 MS PURCELL: Councillor Tom Fortune?
- 6 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.
- 7 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
- 8 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.
- 9 MS PURCELL: Councillor Mary Kavanagh?
- 10 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Here.
- 11 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
- 12 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.
- 13 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?
- 14 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present.
- 15 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Derek Mitchell?
- 16 I thought I saw him coming in.
- 17
- 18 Councillor John Mullen?
- 19 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Present.
- 20 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
- 21 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: (No audible reply.)
- 22 MS PURCELL: Councillor Dermot O'Brien?
- 23 COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Anseo.
- 24 MS PURCELL: Councillor Paul O'Brien?
- 25 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: Present.
- 26 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Rory O'Connor?
- 27 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: Anseo.
- 28 MS PURCELL: Councillor Gerry O'Neill? I can see you there, Councillor O'Neill.
- 29
- 30 We have apologies from Councillor -- thank you. We have apologies from
- 31 Councillor Mick Ryan.
- 32
- 33 Councillor Lourda Scott?
- 34 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Here.

- 1 MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell?
- 2 COUNCILLOR SNELL: (No audible reply.)
- 3 MS PURCELL: Councillor Stephen Stokes.
- 4 COUNCILLOR STOKES: (No audible reply.)
- 5 MS PURCELL: Councillor Edward Timmins?
- 6 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Here.
- 7 MS PURCELL: Councillor Gerry Walsh?
- 8 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Present.
- 9 MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Irene Winters?
- 10 COUNCILLOR WINTERS: (No audible reply.)
- 11 MS PURCELL: Councillor Derek Mitchell?
- 12 COUNCILLOR MITCHELL: Here.
- 13 MS PURCELL: Thank you.
- 14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Helen.
- 15
- 16 Members, you are very welcome. Do we have any votes of sympathy?
- 17 Councillor Edward Timmins?
- 18 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Yes. Just briefly, Chairman, I'd like to propose a vote
- 19 of sympathy to the family of the late Taoiseach John Bruton, who passed away in the
- 20 last week. He served as Taoiseach of this country from 1994 to 1997, and was leader
- 21 of the Fine Gael party, and a person who had great foresight about the future of this
- 22 country and was a politician that I believe was admired right across the board. I'd
- 23 like to pass on a vote of sympathy.
- 24 Thank you.
- 25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Gail Dunne?
- 26 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Sorry.
- 27 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's the other item. No problem. Councillor Patsy
- 28 Glennon?
- 29 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Cathaoirleach, I'd like to ask for a vote of sympathy
- 30 for Christine McNeilly. She was the proprietor of Hollywood Cafe. She opened it
- 31 about five or six years ago, and she died tragically with cancer during the week. So I
- 32 would ask for a vote of sympathy on that. Thank you.
- 33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Anne Ferris?
- 34 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to propose a vote of

1 sympathy for two great men, in my opinion they were great men, who lived in Bray
2 and passed away in the last week. One of them is John Doyle, who is the former
3 president of the Bray District Chamber of Commerce, and owner of HJ Byrne
4 Auctioneers. And John was passionate about the town of Bray, and really worked
5 hard to make it a better place in which to live and work.

6

7 And the other person is Joe O'Mahony, who lived in Charnwood in Bray, and he was
8 a member, a staunch member of the Labour Party, and -- but apart from that, he was
9 very active. He was involved with the Disability Federation of Ireland. His late wife
10 had multiple sclerosis, and Joe minded her during her illness, but unfortunately he
11 passed away last week. So I just want to make tribute to both of those men. Thanks,
12 Cathaoirleach.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Avril Cronin?

14 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. I would just like
15 to express our deepest sympathy to the family of Jim O'Neill in Dunlavin. Jim was
16 widely known in the GAA circles. He was vice chair of the Wicklow County Board
17 a number of years ago. He was very heavily involved in Ard Glen GAA, and in our
18 own village here in Dunlavin. He was also very heavily involved in starting up
19 Dunlavin & District Forum, and he was the very first chairperson of Dunlavin &
20 Direct Forum. But, most importantly, Jim was a very good friend, and we're going to
21 miss him dearly. And I'd like to just express our deepest sympathy to his partner,
22 Anne, and to his sons, Shane and Daniel. Thank you.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Helen, do you have any?

24 MS PURCELL: Can I just double-check the sound with members who are remote?
25 One of -- Councillor O'Neill is having issues. Can everybody else hear me clearly?
26 Yes? Thank you.

27

28 We extend our sympathies to the families of our former colleagues, Séan Hannon
29 and Cecil Ward, and also to the families of Patrick Kearns, father of our colleague,
30 Maria Gunning, and Annette Cashin, mother of our colleague, Con Cashin.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. We will stand for a moment.

32 (All members stand in silence.)

33 MS PURCELL: May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through
34 the mercy of God, rest in peace.

1 (All say "Amen")

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Now, Councillor Gail Dunne?

3 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just quickly, next Wednesday
4 and Thursday down in Arklow, the AILG are having their annual conference.

5 There's a lovely agenda for -- on speakers, and it would be nice for -- it's the first
6 time it's being held in Wicklow, and it'd be nice for as many of my colleagues to get
7 down to the conference and support it, and you'd be very welcome. Thank you.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. I am looking forward to
9 attending, myself.

10

11 Okay. First item on the agenda: To confirm and sign minutes of ordinary meeting of
12 Wicklow County Council held on Monday 8th January 2024. And the copy was
13 attached.

14 Can I have a proposer and a seconder? Councillor Paul O'Brien. Councillor Gail
15 Dunne. Is that agreed? (Agreed).

16 Agreed. Thank you, members.

17

18 The second item is: To consider the disposal of property in the townland of Arklow,
19 County Wicklow comprised in Folio No. WW2998L being the property known as 22
20 Lower Tinahask, Arklow, County Wicklow by Transfer Order to Ms Fionnuala
21 Thomas of 22 Lower Tinahask, Arklow, County Wicklow, the person entitled to the
22 freehold interest in the property, as per the notice previously circulated.

23 Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

24 COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: I propose.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. And Councillor Pat Kennedy second. Is that
26 agreed? (Agreed.)

27 Agreed. Thank you.

28

29 Item number 3: To consider the disposal of 18 square metres or thereabouts in the
30 Townland of Newrath, Rathnew, County Wicklow to Teagasc, Oak Park, Carlow
31 R93 XE12, by the way of a two-year lease commencing on 26 June 2022, as per the
32 notice previously circulated.

33

34 Proposed by Councillor Shay Cullen. Seconded by Councillor Gail Dunne. Is that

1 agreed by all? (Agreed)

2 Agreed? Okay. Thank you.

3

4 Item number 4: To consider the disposal of land situated at Quinnsborough Road
5 and Seymour Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow, known as the Carlisle Grounds, by way of
6 23-year extension to the existing 35-year lease made on the 9th February 2001, as
7 per the notice previously circulated.

8

9 This matter has come before Bray Municipal District already. Looking for a
10 propose --

11 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: I propose, Cathaoirleach.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Proposed by Councillor Anne Ferris. Seconded by
13 Councillor Rory O'Connor. And Councillor Dermot O'Brien, I know you have
14 requested to excuse yourself.

15

16 Councillor Joe Behan?

17 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I just want to be recorded as not being in favour of the
18 motion. Voting against it. The report has already outlined what happened in Bray. I
19 am just not in agreement with my colleagues. I just want it noted.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: That is no problem. As we have dissent, we are going to take
21 a vote, if that is okay.

22 MS PURCELL: So it is item number 4 on the agenda: To consider the disposal of
23 land situated at Quinnsborough Road and Seymour Road, Bray, Co. Wicklow,
24 known as the Carlisle Grounds, by way of 20-year extension to existing 35-year
25 lease made on the 9th February 2001. Councillor Dermot O'Brien has excused
26 himself at this stage, and it was proposed by?

27 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Anne Ferris, and seconded by Councillor Rory
28 O'Connor.

29 MS PURCELL: Seconded by Councillor Rory O'Connor.

30 If you're in favour, please vote for, and if you're against, please vote against.

31 Councillor Tom Annesley.

32 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: For.

33 MS PURCELL: Councillor Mark Barry.

34 COUNCILLOR BARRY: For.

- 1 MS PURCELL: Councillor Joe Behan.
- 2 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Against.
- 3 MS PURCELL: Councillor Vincent Blake.
- 4 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: For.
- 5 MS PURCELL: Councillor Sylvester Bourke is not present.
- 6 Councillor Melanie Corrigan.
- 7 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
- 8 MS PURCELL: Councillor Avril Cronin.
- 9 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
- 10 MS PURCELL: Councillor Shay Cullen.
- 11 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: For.
- 12 MS PURCELL: Councillor Erika Doyle.
- 13 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.
- 14 MS PURCELL: Councillor Gail Dunne.
- 15 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: For.
- 16 MS PURCELL: Anne Ferris.
- 17 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: For.
- 18 MS PURCELL: Councillor Pat Fitzgerald.
- 19 COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: For.
- 20 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy.
- 21 CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
- 22 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Tom Fortune.
- 23 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: For.
- 24 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Patsy Glennon.
- 25 COUNCILLOR GLENNON. For.
- 26 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Mary Kavanagh.
- 27 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Abstain.
- 28 MS PURCELL: Is abstaining. Councillor Pat Kennedy.
- 29 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
- 30 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peir Leonard.
- 31 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: For.
- 32 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Derek Mitchell.
- 33 COUNCILLOR MITCHELL: For.
- 34 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor John Mullen.

1 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: For.

2 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Miriam Murphy.

3 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Yes. For.

4 MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Dermot O'Brien is not present.

5 Councillor Paul O'Brien.

6 COUNCILLOR PAUL O'BRIEN: For.

7 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Rory O'Connor.

8 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: For.

9 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill.

10 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: For.

11 MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Mick Ryan is not present.

12 Councillor Lourda Scott.

13 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.

14 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor John Snell is not present.

15 Councillor Stephen Stokes.

16 COUNCILLOR STOKES: For.

17 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Edward Timmins.

18 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: For.

19 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry Walsh.

20 COUNCILLOR WALSH: For.

21 MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Irene Winters is not present.

22 25 for, one against, five not present, and one abstaining. So it is carried. Thank you.

23 Just if you just give me a moment to get Councillor O'Brien back into the meeting.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem.

25 MS PURCELL: Just waiting for Councillor O'Brien to rejoin. There he is. Thanks.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. Thank you, members.

27

28 Item number 5: To consider the disposal of property in the townland of Bray,
29 County Wicklow known as 9 Scott Park, Boghall Road, Bray, County Wicklow, by
30 transfer order to Ms Jennifer Delittle, as attorney of Dolores Breen, of 9 Scott Park,
31 Boghall Road, Bray, County Wicklow, as per the notice previously circulated.

32 Can I have a proposer and a seconder? Propose -- Councillor Miriam Murphy?

33 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: No, I just want to say, Cathaoirleach, that the volume to
34 us online is very low.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Are other members online finding the volume low?
2 No?

3 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Yes, it is very low, Cathaoirleach.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. So two not, and three, the volume is low. Okay. We
5 will try and speak up.

6 So I am looking for a proposer for that item, and a seconder. Proposed by
7 Councillor Melanie Corrigan. I am happy to second it -- oh, seconded by
8 Councillor Anne Ferris. Thank you.

9 Is that agreed? (Agreed.)

10

11 Okay. Item number 6: To consider the disposal of 115 square metres or thereabouts
12 in the townland of Newrath, Rathnew, County Wicklow to Art McCormack and
13 Thomas O'Leary of MosArt Limited, by way of a one-year lease commencing on the
14 23rd of May 2023, as per the notice previously circulated.

15 Looking for a proposer and a seconder. Proposed by Councillor John Snell. And
16 seconded? Do we have a seconder? Councillor Paul O'Brien. Is that agreed? No
17 dissent? Okay.

18 Is the sound better now for those online? Yes. Brilliant. That's great.

19

20 Okay. Item number 7: To consider disposal of 176 square metres or thereabouts in
21 the townland of Newrath, Rathnew, County Wicklow, known as the Science
22 Laboratory, Clermont House, Rathnew, County Wicklow, to Ms Caoimhe Doyle,
23 128 Kindlestown Park, Greystones, County Wicklow, by way of a one-year lease
24 commencing on the 9th June 2023.

25 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Proposed.

26 CATHAOIRLEACH: Proposed by Councillor Stephen Stokes. Seconded by
27 Councillor Paul O'Brien.

28 Is that agreed? (Agreed.)

29 Agreed. Thank you.

30

31 Item number 8 is: To receive a presentation Wicklow County Council Audit
32 Committee end of year report 2023. And Tom Cregan is here with us. Hi, Tom.
33 You're very, very welcome. And I will hand the mic over to yourself, Tom.

34 MR GREGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Thank you very much. Cathaoirleach,

1 elected representatives, may I take this opportunity to thank you for allowing us to
2 make our presentation to you this evening.

3

4 The Audit Committee is a statutory committee established in accordance with
5 Section 59 of the Local Government Reform Act. The Audit Committee has five
6 members, who are: Mr Noel Geraghty, Vice-Chairman; Ms Mary Savage;
7 Councillor Gerry Walsh; Councillor Edward Timmins; and myself, Tom Gregan, as
8 Chair.

9

10 The role of the Audit Committee is to support the elected members by providing an
11 independent assessment of the corporate governance environment, the quality of risk
12 management, financial reporting, financial management, and internal audit.

13

14 The committee's annual work programme involves regular meetings throughout the
15 year. The function of the Audit Committee are set out in the Local Government
16 Audit Committee Regulations 2014, and may be summarised as follows:

17

Periodic meetings as required by statutory regulations;

18

review financial and budgetary report, practices and procedures within the local
19 authority;

20

foster the development of best practice in the internal audit function;

21

review auditor's report and special reports and assess follow-up actions by
22 management;

23

assess and promote efficiencies and value for money;

24

make such recommendation to the authority as the Committee considers appropriate
25 in relation to the foregoing;

26

review of risk management system;

27

consideration of reports issued by the National Oversight and Audit Commission
28 (NOAC);

29

consideration of any relevant Departmental Value for Money reports; meeting with
30 the local government auditor and consideration of any statutory audit report.

31

32 The next heading then, Cathaoirleach: Internal Audit Assignments for 2023. The
33 audit and accounting firm, Crowley CFK, assists Wicklow County Council in the
34 provision of internal audit services during 2023. The following internal audit reports

1 were finalised during 2023 and reported on the Audit Committee during the year:
2 Accounts payable; administration of burial grounds; SICAP - Bray Area Partnership
3 2021; SICAP - County Wicklow Partnership 2021; Public Spending Code Quality
4 Assurance report 2022.

5

6 And I refer you to appendix 1 to this report for further details.

7

8 There were also ad hoc checks carried out during the year on cash count in motor tax
9 office, Chief Executive orders.

10

11 And the following audits were also commenced and are due to be reported on in
12 early 2024: Audit of grant payments; SICAP Bray Area Partnership 2022; and
13 SICAP and County Wicklow Partnership 2022.

14

15 Complete audits are assigned on an "Assurance Rating" which represents an
16 objective assessment of the control environment operating in the area under review.

17

18 And then moving on, Cathaoirleach, to another important item: Internal Audit
19 Recommendation Tracker. The audit recommendation tracker introduced in 2022
20 provided evidence of compliance and further strengthened the control environment
21 within the organisation. The committee monitored and discussed the outstanding
22 audit recommendation on an ongoing basis throughout 2023.

23

24 Then we have National Oversight and Audit Commission, or NOAC.

25 One of the functions of the Audit Committee is to review the findings and
26 recommendations of the NOAC reports. During 2023, NOAC produced the
27 following reports, which were reviewed by the Audit Committee. NOAC public
28 spending code report 2022 and NOAC local authority performance indicator report
29 2022.

30

31 And then we have annual audit plan. The annual audit plan sets out the proposed
32 assignments for the coming year. The plan is to have the following consultation with
33 the Chief Executive, director of services and heads of function. The list of
34 assignments reflects an ongoing objectives and of achieving efficiencies in our

1 processes, adding value, assessing the control environment, and contributing towards
2 the organisation's strategy objectives. It was presented and agreed by the Audit
3 Committee in December 2023 meeting.

4
5 Then we have the Risk Register: The committee reviewed the Corporate Risk
6 Register in 2023 and will continue to monitor it throughout 2024. The directorate
7 risk registers were all complete in 2023. The committee will continue to monitor
8 review of the risk register as updated following quarterly review by the directors and
9 the senior management team. It was noted by the Audit Committee of the
10 responsibility and to ensure the council has a robust process in place for maintaining
11 updated risk register.

12
13 Local government Audit Report: In accordance with the statutory instruments
14 appointing Audit Committee, the Committee discussed the report for the Local
15 Government Audit Services. Also met with the local government auditor on the 8th
16 of December 2023 to receive the 2022 Local Government Audit Service statutory
17 report.

18
19 As required by Section 121 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by
20 Section 60 of the Local Government Act 2014, I have attached a report to the
21 Council on the Committee's consideration of Government auditor's report. And I
22 refer you, Cathaoirleach, to appendix 2.

23
24 Meetings during the year: The committee met a total of four times during 2023.
25 Meeting with the Chief Executive took place on the 8th of December 2023.

26
27 The procurement officer presented to the Audit Committee on the 8th of December
28 2023. The Audit Committee acknowledges the process and the professional
29 approach being taken in this complex area.

30
31 Audit Committee Effectiveness: Regulation 13 of the Local Government "Audit
32 Committee" Regulation 2024 states that the Audit Committee shall undertake
33 annually a review of its own effectiveness and shall report to the local authority on
34 its findings.

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The Audit Committee has complied with this requirement through the use of extensive evaluation questionnaire. The Audit Committee has reviewed its own performance and effectiveness. This review follows the guidance outline in the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies.

Following this review, I can confirm that the Audit Committee conducts its business in accordance with Local Government Audit Committee Regulations 2014.

In conclusion, Cathaoirleach, on behalf of the Audit Committee, I would like to thank you and the members of the Wicklow County Council for your enduring support and assistance as we assure you of our ongoing commitment to the work of the committee.

Based on the work undertaken by the Audit Committee and the assurance provided by senior management, the Committee is satisfied that any issues identified are being addressed by the relevant section, departments as a matter of urgency.

The Audit Committee is satisfied that its statutory obligations under Local Government Audit Committee Regulations were carried out, and that the objectives of its work programme for 2023 were met.

The Committee reaffirms its commitment to carrying out its regulatory and statutory duties, and fulfilling its oversight role on behalf of the Council.

Go raibh mile maith agat, a Cathaoirleach. Thank you very much indeed. That completes my report. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Tom, for that comprehensive report. Before I open it to the floor, I just want to thank yourself and the rest of the committee members for all the work you do. Finance wouldn't be my area of expertise. So it is reassuring knowing that someone who has those skills is looking after that area.

So I will open it up to the floor now for any members who want to pass any

1 comments or have any questions.

2 No? It looks like you're getting away very lightly here.

3 Sorry, Councillor Vincent Blake?

4 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: I don't have a question either, but I think it is only right
5 that we do, on behalf of the members, thank the Committee and thank the rest of the
6 members of the Committee as well for the work they do on our behalf during the
7 year. So I know Tom has been coming here for a good number of years, and we
8 appreciate the work they do, on a voluntary basis as well.

9 So, I have no questions for you. Obviously, there's -- the Committee and the
10 members there have done a good job in that regard. So thanks again.

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

12 I think that's it, Tom. Thank you so much for all the work you do. Much
13 appreciated.

14 MR GREGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, members. We will move on to the next item.

16 That is: To consider the Chief Executive's monthly management report for January
17 2024, a copy of which was attached. So I will hand over to the Chief Executive now.

18 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Members, I'll take the report as read
19 and circulated to you, but I suppose just to highlight a couple of initiatives, I
20 suppose, in the month of January.

21

22 The new pontoon in Arklow was really very well received. It has been done in
23 collaboration with SSE renewables. A great addition to the harbour in Arklow and to
24 see proper berthing there for fishermen and other users of the harbour.

25

26 And then I suppose, on the circular economy piece, looking at our sustainable cup
27 initiatives that were introduced in Blessington; really welcome initiative between the
28 Tidy Towns and Wicklow County Council, and it'll reduce single-use plastics in the
29 county. And I'd love to see other towns and areas take this initiative on.

30 Participating outlets, I suppose, have been asked to, you know, replace takeaway
31 cups with a more sustainable eco cup, that a user can bring back to repeated stores,
32 and -- in different stores, and have their coffees multiple times.

33

34 So we're happy to take any questions. I see lots of lights on, so I will stop talking

1 now. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Fantastic. Thank you very much, Chief Executive.

3 Councillor John Mullen.

4 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Chief Executive, for
5 the report as usual. Just two queries, really.

6 One is, I note that the active travel was announced last week. And again,
7 congratulations to all the projects that were funded. And I understand that this is an
8 urban-focused initiative by the Government. Having said that, I have pointed out
9 that rural people do also walk and do have active travel needs, and we leveraged a
10 fund here a number of years ago, thanks to Brian Gleeson and other officials, to
11 ensure that rural areas got additional monies for things like footpaths and cycle ways.
12 I hope that is being continued or being looked at.

13

14 In a related matter, the Arklow-Shillelagh Greenway, the public meetings were held
15 way before Christmas, so there should be -- enough time has elapsed for the
16 recommendations out of that public consultation to come out with the preferred
17 route. It's essential that the preferred route be published as quickly as possible, so
18 that we can proceed with this 15-yearlong project so far, to get to the planning and
19 construction stage. Thank you.

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

21 Councillor Gail Dunne?

22 COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just very quickly, I would just
23 like to thank the officials, Emer, Breege, Brian, and especially Joanne O'Dowd, for
24 all the work that was put in in getting the licence for the dredging of Wicklow
25 Harbour. A lot of hard work was put in there, and the Minister this week granted the
26 licence. So I just want to thank -- put on record my thanks.

27 Thank you.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

29 Councillor Edward Timmins?

30 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Just -- thanks, Chairman. Just four brief items. Firstly,
31 I'd like to welcome the fact that the -- finally, the RDF works in Baltinglass are
32 starting today. I was there this morning and met some of the Council staff. They are
33 pacing around the town. They haven't started doing the digging yet. But they are
34 just getting themselves set up. I think they'll dig in tomorrow morning, hopefully.

1 But just to say, finally, after a little over four years, that's finally starting. So I'd like
2 to thank the Council and the CEO for their efforts to get that off the ground.

3

4 Secondly, the fire station in Baltinglass in Dunlavin, money has been allocated a
5 number of years ago for those new projects, and sites are designated, and it's come
6 before the Council here, certainly four or five years ago. I am just wondering, can
7 that project be moved on? It seems to be forgotten.

8

9 On the vacant properties list, which I asked to be updated every month, which I am
10 glad to see is in the Management Report, vacant council houses. I asked this before,
11 but could we -- without getting too complicated here, could we do kind of a
12 summary list of how long they are vacant.

13

14 So if you have 20 properties, you know, five are vacant zero to three months, five are
15 vacant zero to six months, six months to 12 months, one year to two years. Just to
16 give us a focus on the old items that are there vacant more than two years. And, you
17 know, there are such properties out there. So if we could just do a kind of a
18 summary ageing, maybe divide it over four time periods.

19

20 Lastly, then, the RDF, and I asked this last month as well. The courthouse money
21 there -- the courthouse -- the stuff that was dug out of the walls still looks -- you
22 know, it looks poor in the centre of the town. So there is money to repair the
23 courthouse. So could that be dealt with urgently? Thank you.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. I will just take one more
25 before I invite the officials back in.

26 Councillor Pier Leonard?

27 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. And thank you for the report. I know
28 there is a lot of positive and really good stuff going on in it, as usual. I just have a
29 couple of concerns and questions.

30

31 Last week has been a really difficult week for me, personally, as a councillor in
32 Arklow. There's been a lot of speculation over buildings in the town, an eir building
33 being used as an IPAS centre. So I would just like to ask, and get clarification, on
34 what the Council's role is in the duty of care towards the local community, including

1 new communities, and local councillors when speculation like this happens? There's
2 a huge lack of information and transparency in -- that's causing to fuel a lot of anger
3 and fear in the local community.

4

5 Ordinary people, like friends of mine and their families, and older people, are so
6 frightened, they're camping out in front of this building, and they're in their 80s,
7 which is just totally unacceptable, and it is hugely due to the lack of communication.
8 And anybody taking real leadership on this? And the big vacuum from the
9 Department level down to local council.

10

11 I suppose I just want to know as well, as a local councillor, like, I mean, I think we
12 support on the ground to deal with these situations, and we need professional
13 support, and people that are professionally educated to support us in our role in the
14 local communities, to be able to liaise with the local communities and to kind of lead
15 in this and be able to open up a line of communication.

16

17 And just in relation to the tracker system, just clarification on how many different
18 tracker systems there are. I know there are tracker systems for empty buildings on a
19 local level. And how many buildings are on these tracker systems for
20 accommodation. And then the difference between that and the national level tracker
21 systems, which some people seem to know a lot about and then other people haven't
22 a clue that these even exist.

23

24 And then just the other thing is, in relation to the new housing development, the
25 social housing in Tinahask in Arklow, I just would like to ask, it's at design stage
26 now. Does Wicklow County Council have discretion on whether it goes to 179A,
27 Section 179A, or can we go through a normal process where the Councillors get a
28 vote and the public get a chance to submit -- make submissions on that housing
29 development?

30

Thank you.

31

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Chief Executive, I will
32 hand over to you.

33

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members.

34

Councillor Mullen, first of all, on active travel, yes, there was an announcement this

1 week on the fund, but we are very committed, I suppose, to looking at routes in rural
2 area. Because we do -- I fully agree that the more rural the area, the more the need is
3 for good walking and cycling areas, so that is certainly under consideration and
4 hasn't gone off our radar at all. I will ask Leonora to comment on the Greenway in a
5 moment.

6

7 Councillor Dunne, thank you for your comments on the harbour. I would like to pay
8 particular credit to Joanne O'Dowd. She's done phenomenal work at keeping this at
9 the top of the agenda in the Department, and hopefully now we can see work
10 commence, and to the betterment of Wicklow town and the harbour.

11

12 Yes, Councillor Timmins, delighted to see work finally starting on the RDF. It was
13 the first thing that was raised when I started here a year ago. And, you know, I am
14 just sorry it has taken this long to get us on the ground, but, once we're on the
15 ground, we will keep going. I will get Michael to comment on the courthouse, on the
16 walls there.

17

18 In relation to the vacant properties, I don't see any issue in providing a summary
19 report on age -- an ageing of those vacant properties, as to how long they're
20 on -- how long they are vacant for.

21

22 Councillor Leonard, in relation to, I suppose, this situation, not just in Arklow, but
23 around the country, misinformation is absolutely rife in all quarters of the
24 community, all quarters of the country. We get provided information via a request
25 from the Department of Children by Desity (as heard), and they ask a very simple
26 question. They put a property on tracker, and that's the database that they use, and
27 they ask us, have we any information about the building? Positive or negative. And
28 that is it. And they just tell us it's being considered for Ukrainian accommodation or
29 for international protection, or they don't tell us at all. They just ask have we any
30 information about the property. We supply whatever information that might be. So
31 if we have a fire cert, we supply that information.

32

33 And we undertook to the members here that we would supply information to
34 yourselves when a property gets listed on the tracker. That's the first time we have

1 any contact about it. And with the site in particular, there had been rumours for
2 months about it. But the first information that we were provided with was when we
3 contacted the members in Arklow on it.

4

5 I suppose since then, and particularly, credit to Leonora and her team in Arklow,
6 they have been trying to provide advice and guidance to yourselves about the
7 evolving situation in Arklow. It is very, very complex. It is not anywhere anybody
8 wants to be. And this, I suppose, atmosphere of fear and intimidation, and just
9 people not feeling safe in their own community, is just not where any of us want to
10 be.

11

12 It's been replicated around the country. It is not unique to Arklow, unfortunately.
13 We are working very closely with An Garda Síochána. We are sharing whatever
14 information that we have back and forth with them. And I mean, the last information
15 that we had last week was communicated to you, that the property was being taken
16 off the tracker and was going a different route. And there is a vacuum. There is
17 absolutely a vacuum in the information that is being provided to us.

18

19 We endeavour to communicate as much as we can with you. You know what I
20 know. I don't know any more than you do, unfortunately. I wish -- I wish I could
21 hide behind and say I know more. I don't. I honestly do not. And we have been
22 very upfront with the information that we have been giving.

23

24 There is one tracker in place. We have obviously properties that we consider
25 ourselves, that we get refurbished, and what might be suitable for Ukrainian
26 accommodation, or whatever it might be, and that is on that tracker. There is one
27 piece of information.

28

29 The Department are dealing directly with owners of buildings. There is
30 certainly -- and this has been raised at a national level -- a lack of communication
31 between the Department and the local authorities and the members, both elected
32 members here and Oireachtas members, about what is happening on individual
33 properties.

34

1 I would say as well that there needs to be an increased level of due diligence applied
2 by the Department when they're considering properties. We have had it in the past
3 with other sites in the county where not the full ownership of the property was made
4 aware to the Department, and then deals fell through.

5

6 So I think the situation is so dire in the country at the moment, that accommodation
7 is so scarce, that any offer of accommodation is being seriously considered by the
8 Department, whether the person offering the accommodation has the right to do so.
9 So at the CCMA level, which is the City & County Managers Association, so it's all
10 of my colleagues around the county, we are communicating with the Department.
11 We have written to them as late as last week, the Chair of the committee did, about
12 wanting stronger processes in place that assure ourselves and yourselves that when a
13 property is being put forward for consideration, that the person putting it forward has
14 the right to do so. And that is not all -- that has proved not to be the case in a number
15 of situations.

16

17 But all I can do is assure you that we will continue to share information with you as
18 and when we get it. I think we have been quite proactive in that. And as I said,
19 particularly credit to the Arklow MD team. They have been in constant contact with
20 yourselves about this evolving situation in Arklow.

21

22 I don't -- I suppose, I don't really want to talk about the specifics of an individual
23 case, because I don't want to get individuals named and, you know, just highlight
24 tensions even more.

25

26 If there are concerns, contact the Gardaí. If members are feeling under threat,
27 contact the Gardaí. We do have the AILG, we do have LAMA as well, who are
28 there as support to members, and reach out to those areas. As I said, we have been
29 working very closely with the guards on this matter, and we will continue to do so,
30 and any information we get, we will share with the members, as we have been doing
31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Chief Executive. There's just the -- I
32 am going to hand over to Leonora and to Michael. There's just the fire station at
33 Baltinglass as well. Sorry.

34

MS O'GORMAN: Leonora will deal with that as well.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Perfect. Thank you.

2 MS EARLS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just in relation to the Arklow-Shillelagh
3 Greenway, so we are in the final stages of the Phase II, and that will -- the options
4 selection, and that will allow us to go to the design and the environmental evaluation.

5

6 Now, I will be honest with you, the team has been pretty much full-time on the
7 Blessington Greenway submission to An Bord Pleanála in the last short while.

8 That's now been -- that submission has gone in, so they can really go back onto the
9 Arklow-Shillelagh one. So we should move that one along quickly now.

10

11 The fire station in Dunlavin and Baltinglass, yeah, no, they are still moving along.
12 We've done engaging with the crews in both stations to make sure that the design of
13 the stations meet their needs. We are engaging with the consultants on the fact that
14 the costs have increased exponentially in relation to building them. But we are
15 talking to the Department on that. So we would hope to be going out to tender for
16 the building of those.

17 Thank you

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Michael?

19 MR NICHOLSON: With regard to the courthouse in Baltinglass, I had hoped -- in
20 fact, I was assured that, by today's meeting, that plastering would have been done. It
21 wasn't. I checked this morning. I know it's in hand. My apologies, Councillor, I
22 was assured it would be done today. It will be done very, very quickly. And thank
23 you for raising it again.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

25 MR LANE: Regarding the design for Tinahask. At the moment, Section 179
26 applies. There will be now an extension to 179A. If 179A comes in, we will contact
27 the councillors. Regardless, we have taken, and will take into account what the
28 elected members said the last day, and we will be back to the elected members in
29 Arklow before any advertisement is made in the development.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Okay. Councillor Mary Kavanagh?

31 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Thanks, Chair. Just two questions. I want to know
32 if there's any update on The Morrough, the new rock armour that's to go in. It's been
33 about three months since we had the storm that almost decimated the passable area
34 of The Morrough, and we had to have a new path installed. But none of the works

1 have even begun yet. Now, I know it takes a good few weeks to get tenders and
2 things in place. But, as I say, it's coming up for three months now, and I just think
3 that we're at a loss to know what is going on there.

4

5 Now, the other one concerns an email that I received, and I really just want to see has
6 this been flagged with the Council, and if you are aware of it. It's to do with drilling
7 for lithium in an area called Moylisha Hill. And the problem with -- the potential
8 problem is the effect on the water supply, which has been notified to myself, and I'm
9 sure all the other councillors as well.

10

11 The drilling is going to go on for about ten months; two diamond drill rigs operating
12 for 12 hours a day, six days a week. They're mining for -- or they're prospecting for
13 lithium. An exploratory drilling will affect the purity of the water supply, not just on
14 Moylisha Hill, but across the southeast region. This pristine supply is vital for
15 domestic use, agricultural use, industrial use, local recreational use, and for tourism
16 use. Protecting this water is in keeping with Coillte's aim of serving climate, nature,
17 wood and people. Further drilling will also compromise the biodiversity and rich
18 archaeological heritage in this area of high amenity along the Wicklow Way.

19

20 So I am really just asking, is Wicklow County Council aware of this? And have they
21 taken the potential adverse effects on the water supply into consideration?

22 Thank you.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gerry Walsh?

24 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to the Chief Executive
25 for the report. Just firstly, looking at the housing adaptation grants, and it is good to
26 see that the amount of applications there, I think we're up -- we're significantly
27 increased the number of applications there. I know Covid intervened.

28

29 But my question in relation to that is, just looking at the monies available, when that
30 is fully spent, and actually we're getting close to it, what is the process about
31 replenishing that fund for -- obviously, for further applications?

32

33 Moving on. The ORIS, the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, in relation to
34 the Cliff Walk in Greystones, the protection scheme there, I know there's issues

1 around third-party lands being purchased. It is ongoing for some time now. So I am
2 just wondering is there any update on that?

3

4 And on the Coastal Blueway Projects, I just want to compliment the district engineer
5 in Greystones, Rory O'Hanlon, for his work on the Greystones south beach
6 boardwalk, which has proved to be a fairly popular addition to our amenity there,
7 and widely used.

8

9 Just moving on. The URDF RRDF interdisciplinary team, just reading that, working
10 with the subgroups and the steering groups, is that a new approach to URDF funding
11 or is that an approach that was always there? And I see call 4 for that funding
12 scheme is expected in early '24, if there's any update on that?

13

14 And also just the dog licences. I see we have over 5,000 issued in 2023, and we
15 have, which is welcome, one new dog warden with the ISPCA, appointed in January.
16 So does that mean that we have three overall dog wardens for the county? I know
17 the issue of dogs and attacks came up at our policing forum meeting in Greystones
18 there quite recently. There had been a number of incidents. And it is a concern.
19 And the issue came back about dog wardens, and the lack of dog wardens. I'm just
20 wondering if there's any information in terms of the number of fines issued by dogs
21 wardens for -- you know, for dogs not effectually under control and other issues
22 around that.

23 So that's it. Thank you

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

25 Councillor Lourda Scott?

26 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yes, thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Chief Executive,
27 for a very detailed report, as always. Just a couple of queries.

28 I was wondering if there any more specific updates regarding the park & ride facility
29 that's proposed in Fassaroe, and also progress on the other park & rides at Junction
30 11 and Junction 16.

31

32 I believe, for our previous presentation, that there was to be some movement, I think,
33 quarter 1, particularly, on perhaps plans in terms of the Junction 11 and Junction 16.
34 But anyway, I was just wondering where we were with those.

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Secondly, again, sort of welcoming the news of the NTA active travel funding, particularly around the allocations to three schools in Greystones, which is badly needed. But I was disappointed in the middle of last year to learn that the plan and the funding that was allocated to link Lott Lane in Kilcooke to Charlesland, and then subsequently on to Greystones seafront was dropped, and that scheme was renamed as the Greystones Pathfinder.

And I see that it doesn't appear to be reinstated on the current allocation of the scheme that was released there the other day. And I was just wondering was there any other source of funding being sought from the Council for this? As I am being contacted by quite a few constituents, as well as my own personal feelings on it, it would have really been a game changer with pedestrian and cycle links from Kilcooke, linking up with schools in Greystones, along with sports facilities in Charlesland, et cetera.

And on a kind of related note, again, I'm just wondering if there is any update regarding the rollout of periodic speed limit signs? Thank you

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Chief Executive, I might hand over to you now.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members. I might get Breege to come in on Councillor Kavanagh's queries on The Morrough and on the lithium drilling.

In relation to the housing adaptations, Councillor Walsh, I suppose when the fund is expended, we make application to the Department, and, subject to the Department's resources, they may or may not allocate further funding to us for that. But obviously, we're in a far better position when we have spent the money we've been allocated to go back and look for more, and then just depending on how things are going there.

Yes, we have had an additional dog warden allocated as part -- with the ISPCA. Breege might be able to comment on the number of fines issues, or we certainly might be able to provide that information to you in writing.

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In relation to the URDF, the interdisciplinary group, I suppose when I took up the role here, and having spoken with colleagues, we felt that there needed to be a kind of cross-departmental approach to projects, so that it wasn't being done in isolation, that one department would apply for the funding, and then it might get left in abeyance. So we have a steering committee which is, I suppose, led by Lorraine and Leonora, looking at the projects and driving them on. So I am hoping that will be more fruitful in terms of -- we were very good at leveraging funding from the Department, but we weren't great at getting it out on the ground and getting it spent. So this will just have an oversight and road to that.

In relation to the new call for the URDF, we are currently just, I suppose, weighing up what projects we will look at. We can provide information to the members. I did say previously that we would consult with members about URDF applications and what was, you know, appropriate or otherwise to be submitted.

I will get Leonora then to come in on Councillor Scott's queries; they were all, I think, for you, Leonora. So I will hand over to Breege first.

Thank you.

MS KILKENNY: Thank you. So just on the first issue by Councillor Kavanagh. In terms of the works done by The Morrough, as you know, we have Marc Devereux, who is our senior engineer, who is part of that committee. I think they were meeting with Irish Rail last week. But just to make it clear, the works that Irish Rail were doing are investigative works. They're looking at the protection of the railway from Wicklow all the way up towards Dublin. So I think the information that they were doing was gathering site investigation information. And that will be part of the longer plan to protect the coastline. But what I will do, Councillor Kavanagh, is I will get Mark to prepare an update just exactly where that is at.

The second issue. In terms of the prospecting licences, the Council, or, like, the executive, or Wicklow County Council, like every other person in the country, all we get is a notification published in the newspaper to say that a prospecting licence is being granted, and they list all the townlands associated with it. Now, that's done by the Department; falls under exploration, mineral exploration.

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I made two attempts to call that department to find out a little bit more about what all this was about, and I am getting nowhere, basically. So -- like, I think we need to know, as a council, what is the whole detail attached with these? What does it mean when somebody goes out for a prospecting licence? I presume it's something that, if somebody makes a request, they would have to come up with specific reasons why they couldn't do an exploration drilling. But I still think we need to know why, and what is the national plan for, let's say, the extraction of our natural minerals from the ground? What -- you know, what is the Government, and what is the picture in terms of how valuable our own natural mineral resources are? So that's all I can say to you on that, is I will keep persevering on that.

In relation to the dog warden query, I do know that we put in a request for an additional dog warden. I am not sure if that has come back yet to say that it's been granted -- yes, it's been funded, but we just haven't got any further information on that. But we are -- again, we are pursuing that.

And in terms of fines or whatever, I have just asked for that information. I will try to get it back to you, Councillor Walsh, before the end of the meeting

MS EARLS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. In relation to park & ride. So the Fassaroe one, as you know, is passed by Part 8, and we are going out to tender on documents. Well, that's being done by the park & ride team in the NTA. So hopefully quarter 2, quarter 3, that should be out to tender.

We expect to go out on public display on the Ashford/Rathnew one shortly. The one in Kilpeddar is likely to take a bit longer because it is most likely going to need a Natura Impact Statement carried out on it.

In relation to the Charlesland Kilcoole Lott Lane, so the priority was given to the pathfinders, and that was -- the pathfinders for Greystones and Wicklow were through the Department of Transport looking to prioritise certain areas. So certainly, after the pathfinder has been done, we can seek funding for that Kilcoole job. And we'll keep it on our radar in relation to that.

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The periodic speed signs. So all the poles, the bases and the infrastructure are in. We did have some engagement with the schools about the location, because they wanted them slightly changed. That's all been done. So the speed signs themselves will be in place by the end of February.

Thank you

MR NICHOLSON: Cathaoirleach, just two queries from Councillor Walsh. The Coastal Blueway, yeah, that's a great scheme. It's going to involve improvements from Bray right down to Arklow, on the coastal spots. They've done great work in Greystones, which we acknowledge. And also, there's work planned for Brittas Bay and also for Arklow.

With regard to the Cliff Walk, we're just finalising maps to prepare the CPO process. It's important we spend time getting these maps right, because they will determine, ultimately, the cost we pay on the land. So I will keep the members posted on that. But the maps are being done as we speak.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Derek Mitchell?

COUNCILLOR MITCHELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. The first thing it mentions, it mentions here about the Chapel Road pedestrian and cycle infrastructure improvement, a CPO from 2021, and it gives various dates. And it's three years since the CPO was published, and it has been finalised and work is -- discussions are ongoing, it says.

But it says that the tender documents for the construction phase will be issued early in 2024. And we've had a number of different deadlines on this, which have all gone back. And I would like to know more detail about when is early 2024?

Also, tender documents for the appointment of a consultant to oversee construction. The Council has allocated substantial money from the development levies for this road, which is very badly needed. The present road is in a shocking state, and, really, it needs something done very urgently. And this has been going on for a long, long time. So I just emphasise the importance of this, and I would like to see is there any further information about when the tender documents for construction are going

1 to be issued?

2 That is one point

3

4 The other one was the Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk, which Councillor Walsh
5 mentioned there. And the Council has been trying to purchase lands, so far
6 unsuccessfully, for a couple of years. I was keen that this would be opened, but with
7 a diversion at the south end, so that they could go along Cliff Road and down the R
8 761 and turn over the level crossing at Redford. And that, I believe, is to be done.

9

10 But there's also a part in Bray where it's closed, because substantial work, I think,
11 needs to be done on netting to try and stop rocks falling at the Bray end. And I am
12 not quite sure where that is. But there is a need to somehow try and liaise between
13 the two and get this open. I know it won't be as good to have a diversion, but a
14 diversion never is good; but at least it will be open, and people will be -- signposted,
15 and people will be encouraged to use it. So I would just like to see that there is
16 liaising on that. I am interested to know the timetable of the -- of both parts.

17 Thank you

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Pat Kennedy?

19 COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I just don't want to
20 go back over everything that has been said already. But I do want to welcome the
21 8.5 million in the active travel allocation. I think -- and full credit to all in the roads
22 department and the safety officer and whoever else was involved in getting it. That
23 is a huge allocation for the county, and it is very much welcomed, that type of
24 investment, into the county.

25

26 But I also want to point out the fact that there's 500,000 of that for bus shelter
27 enhancement. And, as the Chief Executive -- sometimes the greater need is in rural
28 areas as well. And I would like to see everywhere that there is a bus service, even if
29 it is a school bus service in small villages, that they all get a bus shelter where
30 possible, and we get as many of the rural villages right around the county covered as
31 we can with bus shelters, because it will facilitate school children, elderly, and
32 others, whether it's on the local link bus, or whatever means of public transport
33 they're travelling on. I think it would -- it's very much welcome, and I just do want
34 to congratulate the whole team in securing that funding for the county. It is well

1 done.

2

3 The other thing I would like to just say to the Chief Executive, and I know you have
4 been working on this, just in relation to the master plan for Rathdrum and Brides
5 Head -- and I won't speak about Brides Head, I think Councillor Cullen was dealing
6 with that one, working with that. And I know the group who have expressed an
7 interest in that received an email last week to say that the consultant would be in
8 touch with them shortly. I would hope that that would happen sooner rather than
9 later, because there is a desperate need on rural sporting groups to get access to those
10 lands.

11

12 And the final point I want to bring up today, Cathaoirleach, is, and I suppose it is
13 something a little bit different, but I would ask the Council senior management if
14 they would write to the ESB in relation to the volume of outages in the Avoca,
15 Aughrim, Rathdrum area. It has gone way beyond a joke. We're told that it's the
16 Kilmagig substation needs upgrading. But to have the amount of outages, with
17 people working from home, it is nonstop for the last year and a half, the amount of
18 outages. So maybe, Chief Executive, yourself or whoever you delegate would
19 contact the ESB in relation to that and try and find out what is going on.

20 Thanks, Cathaoirleach

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Councillor Anne Ferris?

22 COUNCILLOR FERRIS: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Well, firstly, I would like to
23 thank the Chief Executive for her report. Very comprehensive, as always. And I am
24 glad to see that there is some good -- or there's lots of good news in it, actually. But
25 I just want to raise something, Cathaoirleach, that was brought to my attention over
26 the weekend, and it's in relation to drainage problems on the L 1033, Rocky Valley
27 Drive in Kilmacanogue.

28

29 Now, I understand that, you know, I think this is for the Director of Roads, but I
30 think it had to do with a planning application. The planning application was
31 submitted back in 2022, I think, for a single dwelling along that road, and during the
32 time that the planning application was going through the process, all the drains along
33 the road were closed off.

34

1 Now, this is very -- this is very, I suppose, disturbing and concerning for the
2 residents who live along that road, because the water drains off the Carragoona
3 Mountains, and, you know, if -- you know, if the drains are not open, well, then it
4 will go into people's property, and also just to point out that the drains are obviously
5 on commonage from land at Sliabh Bawn and Carragoona.

6

7 So I understand then that someone from the Council came and opened the -- a
8 number of the drains, but they did not reopen the drain -- the -- sorry, the main drain
9 and the shore. And at this time, that particular drain remains closed.

10

11 Now, the residents -- I know a lot of the complaints about that, and I know that they
12 raised that with one or two other councillors. But I just find this very disturbing,
13 because it's not -- the drains are not on private land, they are in commonage, as I say,
14 and it is not one that -- that remains closed is the main drain. I think some video
15 footage has been taken, and perhaps sent to the Council. But it just seems to me to
16 be very, I suppose, peculiar that, you know, all the other drains, four or five other
17 drains, are regularly cleaned, cleared out of any debris that's in it, but this one drain
18 remains covered.

19

20 And what I want to know is, is there a reason for this? You know, is there a problem
21 with that drain that it cannot be reopened or, you know, does the Director know
22 about this information?

23

24 When the planning permission was granted for this dwelling, one of the main -- well,
25 with 11 conditions. One of the conditions -- one of the concerns, and I think it was
26 covered in the conditions, was about the drainage on this road and the need for it to
27 be able to -- you know, for the water to be able to go down the drain.

28

29 So yes, I just want to ask the Director does she know about it and is there a reason
30 for this? Because it is of deep concern to the other residents living on the road.

31 Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Melanie
33 Corrigan?

34 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Chief

1 Executive, for the report. I just want to raise -- we got bad news in the Enniskerry
2 community over the weekend, that the An Óige Hostel, who, for the last three years,
3 has been housing Ukrainians, is due to close the end of March. An Óige want the
4 property back. There's 69 Ukrainians there that have been very, very widely
5 accepted into the community. A lot of them are working in the community. 12
6 children are in school locally. And it's caused a huge amount of upset.

7
8 And I am asking, can the Council do anything, get in contact with An Óige to try and
9 extend that lease? Because, as I say, they've been widely welcomed, they're part of
10 the community, and to have them uprooted again and, you know, the children that
11 have settled in school, and the schools have gone out -- above and beyond
12 welcoming the families; if there was anything that could be done?

13
14 I also want to raise that there are two vacant HSE properties in the village that could
15 easily be repurposed, and I would like the Council to write to the HSE or try and
16 follow up and find out why they can't be used. They have been sitting idle, one for
17 over 20 years, one for possibly even longer. So I just wanted to raise both those
18 issues and see if there is anything that can be done.

19
20 And I also want to raise a flooding on the Quill Road in Kilmacanogue. It's been
21 going on for months and months now, and it's causing huge disturbance to the people
22 over there. The houses -- a house nearby has been flooded; the garden has been
23 flooded. I know our local engineer has been working on it, but I just want to try and
24 get something done on that as soon as possible, because it's really -- like, the road is
25 totally closed with any rain. So I just wanted to raise that and see can we get that
26 expedited.

27 Thank you

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Chief Executive, I will
29 hand over to yourself.

30 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members. I would ask
31 Leonora to deal with Chapel Road and the tender, the issue around the tenders there.
32 Also on the bus shelter enhancement scheme -- you're getting a lot of queries here,
33 Leonora -- on the drainage issue that Councillor Ferris issued, and certainly what
34 Councillor Corrigan has raised there about the flooding in Kilmacanogue.

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Just in relation to the An Óige Hostel situation, we will certainly contact them. I'm happy to do that. I know the team within the Housing Department are, I suppose, constantly looking for suitable accommodation, you know, to try and provide own-door accommodation where possible, for particularly those families that have settled in the county and have integrated, and are -- you know, children in school, children who are members of clubs. You know, obviously, the ideal would be for those families to remain in the locality, where they have been warmly welcomed, and we will certainly work to do that. I have no issue contacting the HSE about it either. I'll certainly do that.

Councillor Kennedy, in relation to the ESB, I will contact the ESB myself about -- I wasn't aware of the volume of outages in that geographical area. We will certainly do that.

In relation to the master plan for Rathdrum and Brides Head, yeah, with the consultant, we will be in touch. I'm very keen to see that progress. It's a matter of urgency. It's kind of long overdue, and I suppose pulling all the groups that are interested together is going to take time, but I think we will have a really good plan for both areas when we come out the other side of it.

So I am going to hand over to Leonora now. Thank you.

MS EARLS: Thank you. Councillor Mitchell, yes, Chapel Road, our plan is to go out in quarter 2 for the tender. And, look it, I -- we ourselves are frustrated with how long these things are taking, but, unfortunately, at the moment I am dealing with loaves and fishes when it comes to team and engineers, because they're all trying to cover about 21 different projects at the moment between the four of them. But quarter 2 is the aim for the tender on Chapel Road.

The bus shelter enhancement. I have already spoken to the NTA and told them that, in many districts, the elected members have used discretionary funding for bus shelters, and that they need to complement those shelters. And we specifically did mention schools and local link to them in that regard.

Councillor Ferris and Councillor Corrigan, I will raise those two matters with the

1 district engineer in Bray. They are matters that would fall under with his remit. Of
2 course, if we can be of any assistance, we will.

3 Thanks.

4 MR NICHOLSON: Just a couple of queries there. In relation to the Cliff Walk
5 alternative route, yes, we have followed up on Councillor Mitchell's proposals, and
6 we will be reopening that alternative Greystones route for the Greystones part of the
7 Cliff Walk. We can't do it until we have signs in place. Signs have been ordered,
8 and we are just awaiting delivery. As soon as those signs come, we will erect them,
9 and we will be diverting people onto the diversion from the existing Cliff Walk, the
10 Greystones side.

11 I think Lorraine might have an update on the Bray side?

12 MS GALLAGHER: Yes. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. So the team went out to tender
13 for rock stabilisation works before Christmas. One tender was received. The team
14 was quite surprised at the cost of the tender. So they met with the tenderer this week
15 to look at some cost reduction. So that's the up-to-date position at the minute.

16 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor Erika Doyle?

18 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thanks. Thank you, Chair, thank you, Cathaoirleach, and
19 thank you for the Chief Executive's report.

20

21 Just on the Cliff Walk, I think when we're appearing in The Irish Times' letters page,
22 it's probably time to grab the bull by the horns. I know we are getting through
23 piecemeal bits of information at Bray and at Greystones, but I think when we have
24 anything even remotely significant, we should think about putting out -- you know,
25 communicating with the public and putting out a statement letting people know
26 what's happening. I think most of the frustration comes from people just not
27 knowing what is happening. They feel there is a vacuum in information, and things
28 are moving very slowly, and that can lead people to believe that nothing is being
29 done, and in some cases that there's some kind of other motivations for nothing being
30 done. So I would just ask that maybe Wicklow, you know, taking in Bray and
31 Greystones collectively, could think about putting out a statement when there is
32 something to be said.

33

34 Just on something completely different. I would like to ask that, when this local

1 authority, as a landlord, is doing works on our tenants' homes, particularly around the
2 area of housing adaptations, where we have older people, that we take on, you know,
3 utmost care and respect for our tenants while doing so.

4

5 I was dealing with an individual recently, an elderly man, whose bathroom was being
6 done, and who had been given a Portaloo, not -- not in his garden, but across the
7 road, in an area that I think it would be safe to describe as slightly rough. And this
8 elderly man had to make his way out during the storm, across a road to use a
9 Portaloo, on a road, on a public road, while people coming home from the pub are
10 messing around. He was terrified. He had taken to going to the bathroom in his
11 garden.

12

13 Now, after intervention, the water was reconnected. He was told that the water
14 couldn't be reconnected every night for him to use his bathroom. I think that's
15 shocking, and absolutely unacceptable. And I would just like to ask that due care
16 and thought be given to our tenants when works are taking place, because I don't
17 think any of us would like to see a family member in that situation, fearful to even go
18 to the bathroom. And, look, perhaps -- perhaps it could be said that there was a
19 logistic reason here or there. I don't see it, myself. And I really don't want to see
20 anything like that happening again to one of our tenants. So if we could just maybe
21 look at, you know, where this comes from, who signs off on this, is it contractors,
22 who has oversight on these issues, that would be great. Thank you very much.

23

24 Just on the NTA funding, yes, the figure is welcome. It is a high figure, and there is
25 record funding for active travel from this government. I am not sure that I am seeing
26 it filtered down to projects on the ground in a way that I would like, particularly in
27 my district of Bray. Chief Executive, I did send you an email just today on same, so
28 I don't expect you to have had eyes on it yet. I am not questioning the quality of the
29 staff that we have. I am just wondering, I did write to the NTA last year, and I was
30 told that the issues were to do with staffing. Now, again, that is not the quality, so is
31 it the quantity? Where are we going wrong? Why is this money not filtering down
32 to projects on the ground? We have announced projects on occasion, and then
33 withdrawn them several times in Bray.

34

1 And it's just -- it's frustrating, because oftentimes we are told that there's no money
2 for something. Now we're being told that there is the money, but that doesn't seem to
3 be coming out in projects on the ground, and it would be great maybe to have a
4 conversation around why that isn't happening.

5

6 And then finally, I just have a question. There is a school in Bray that will be
7 closing tomorrow for the full day because they were told by the ESB that works were
8 being taken place that would necessitate the power being turned off, and the school
9 would have to close for the full day.

10

11 Now, I am just wondering, does the Council have -- and I can supply further
12 details -- does the Council have any involvement in this, any relationship with the
13 chain of command, I suppose, to allow this to happen? Because I feel, for a school
14 to be told on a Wednesday that they will have to close on the Tuesday, the following
15 Tuesday, and to tell parents that this is another -- that this is an unexpected day off,
16 for works that I am assuming are related to the private development that is happening
17 close by; and I don't know, it was Friday when I found this out, so I have been trying
18 to get information. Obviously, today is Monday, so there's been a dearth of
19 information.

20

21 But I am just wondering, does the Council have any role in signing off on something
22 like this? Because I don't feel that that is acceptable. The school are upset. The
23 parents are upset. I don't feel like a school should be closing for works to take place
24 on another development. The development should have to work around the school.
25 I haven't heard of anything like this happening before. But it would be great just to
26 get a response. And if the Council does have a role, and, if so, what that is.

27 Thank you very much.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Miriam
29 Murphy?

30 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Sorry there. I just want to bring up two things. The
31 first one is around the application grants and just as the CEO had mentioned earlier
32 on about funding running out, does that mean is there a waiting list? And, if so, how
33 long would the waiting list have to wait? You know, do the Department give the
34 funding if you apply for it straight away or is there a lengthy wait? I am not quite

1 clear on that. I would hate to think of people having to wait months regarding the
2 application grants because I mean it is vital for the people who apply.

3

4 Also, the active travel, how does that fit in with disability activity? And also, on the
5 bus shelter, I hope that the bus areas would be fully accessible for the buses that need
6 to be ramped, because I know there is a requirement if there is an accessible bus
7 there has to be a proper height or something for the ramps. So I would like that to be
8 acknowledged. So thank you.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Joe Behan?

10 COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just a couple of points. The first
11 one, just going back to the discussion that Councillor Leonard raised, and the
12 response of the Chief Executive, and the response then of the planning director to
13 Councillor Kavanagh's point.

14

15 In both cases, it would appear to me that Government departments are making
16 decisions that are affecting this county, the people of this county, and not alone is
17 there no contact with the councillors, there appears to be no contact with the officials
18 either. It is incredible to hear the Director of Planning saying that she was not aware,
19 and tried to get information on the question that Councillor Kavanagh raised about
20 the mining that is happening, which could have huge impacts, and the Director
21 couldn't get a straight answer, and the Chief Executive saying she's not getting any
22 direct information, and the Chief Executives are writing to the Government
23 department as a body.

24

25 Now, last month, the councillors in Mayo County Council unanimously agreed a
26 motion that the council should stop -- Mayo County Council should cease having any
27 dealings with the Department of Integration because of the lack of consultation with
28 members, publicly elected representatives in that county. It was passed unanimously
29 across party lines; Independents, everybody agreed to it. They were to write to all of
30 the other councils. I don't know if they did or not.

31

32 But I am suggesting here today that perhaps this is something that we should take on
33 as well, because we are not being treated properly by that particular department, and
34 it is causing huge anxiety, stress, worry and upset right across this county, but indeed

1 right across the country. And it is not good enough for a Department of Integration
2 and a junior minister to basically be calling the shots on this issue. I am putting it
3 out there. It may not be necessary to have a vote on it today or anything like that. I
4 think it is something that we should consider.

5

6 Secondly, in relation to work that's going on at the moment, that Wicklow County
7 Council would have been intimately involved in at one stage anyway in deciding
8 planning on it. There's work going on in a site called the Foggy Field at the entrance
9 to Kilruddery development. And I am not sure if it is Irish Water or the contractor
10 who is actually building the houses in there. It has caused huge disruption to local
11 residents, because roads, entrances have been interfered with, entrances into the
12 estate, roads being dug up, huge inconvenience, lots of traffic delays.

13

14 A simple question for the Chief Executive: Do we have any oversight when a
15 project like this begins, particularly if it is Irish Water that's involved in it, to ensure
16 that residential amenity is protected?

17

18 Thirdly, a decision was made by the planning section in Wicklow County Council
19 last week which, in my view, has to be one of the most bizarre and completely
20 incredible planning decisions ever made by this body, and, let's face it, we've seen
21 plenty of them in the past. It concerned an application for three mobile food units on
22 a site on Calary, where the owner of the site wanted to have a few little facilities;
23 toilet facilities, a car parking area, a children's play area, and a couple of, if you like,
24 mobile vans for food. And it was completely rejected by this Council.

25

26 But I can say that 60 years ago, that very site was the site of a garage, a petrol filling
27 station, a shop and a seating area. And it was good enough 60 years ago, but, as far
28 as the planners in Wicklow County Council are concerned, it's not good enough
29 today to provide a facility like that in such a magnificent and scenic area, for people
30 to be able to go to the toilet, be able to buy an ice cream, or whatever the case might
31 be. I do not understand it. I don't expect anybody from the top table to explain it.
32 But I certainly don't understand it. But I do believe it brings the planning system into
33 disrepute, when ridiculous decisions like that are made, and I wonder whether
34 planners were aware of the history of that site, because I certainly am.

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Second last point, Cathaoirleach, if I could. On the Cliff Walk, could I ask the Director directly, and Director Nicholson, have there been any discussions with any of the landowners on the Greystones site? I mean discussions, talks, either with the landowners or with their legal representatives, to try and facilitate a resolution of the difficulties that we are experiencing at the moment in having that Cliff Walk unopen? Just a straight yes or no will do on that.

And, finally, again, for the housing section, but again, I think it is something that we should all be aware of. When a person becomes homeless, and there isn't a facility for them to stay somewhere, they're given what's called a self-accommodation letter. And they're basically told, right, this letter is worth €60, or whatever it is, go off and find somewhere yourself.

Now, in a particular case, a father and a son went to accommodation, the only accommodation they could find. When they handed up the letter -- and I am not going to name the premises. When they handed up the letter, they were told that particular location, accommodation unit, doesn't recognise these letters and doesn't honour them. I think that's a disgrace. Because, as far as I am concerned, a commitment by the Council should be the same as cash.

But what I want to ask, Cathaoirleach, is, would the Director agree that, in a case like that, where a hotel refuses to honour, and the person has to try and find the money themselves, can they be reimbursed if they can prove that they stayed in that particular accommodation for the days and nights that they were homeless? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor. Councillor Gerry O'Neill?

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Sorry, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah, no, go ahead, Gerry.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Yeah, thanks a million. I just want to thank the CEO for the report.

Getting back to the issue of refugees and that, again, I want to thank two officials from Wicklow who rang me there last week to inform me that there were -- there

1 was an assessment to bring 32 direct provision people, I believe, into Dunlavin;
2 otherwise, we would know nothing about it. But the big concern here is, you know,
3 the CEO did mention that, you know, they were in contact with the Gardaí at all
4 times about these things. But there's no contact, seemingly, with schools or doctors
5 or dentists, or the services that we need in the area, that we don't have in the area.

6
7 In the Blessington area here, I have been dealing here with people over the last
8 couple of weeks who moved into the town, into a social housing programme
9 elsewhere and their children can't access the local schools. The schools are full. So I
10 think it's very important that, you know, when we're bringing in dozens and dozens
11 of these unfortunate people that we have the infrastructure, which we don't have in
12 West Wicklow. It's just -- it's scandalous. It is not fair on the unfortunate people and
13 it is not fair on the principals of the schools or the teachers and staff of the schools.
14 It's just -- it's not on.

15
16 So I think it is very important that the Department or someone should be making
17 contact with the infrastructure of the towns that they intend bringing people.

18
19 It's a big issue in West Wicklow, to be truthful. We had the scandalous situation
20 there on St Brigid's Day, where St Brigid's hospital was burned to the ground right
21 on the border of Dublin and Wicklow there. Hundreds of people from this part of
22 Wicklow availed of the services there throughout the years and it employed many
23 people from the area. I know it has been closed for four years. But it is inexcusable
24 to burn a hospital to the ground. I mean, you'd get it in Gaza, with Israeli attacks on
25 the hospitals within the Gaza Strip. But to see a hospital burn -- it's sad, it's
26 unbelievable. I have been working and involved in the safe roof scene for a long
27 time and no matter what grievances people have about what this is not the answer
28 anyway.

29
30 Again, could I just express the concern in the area for the amount of refugees coming
31 into the area, the housing, where we have 30 and 40 people per house. I don't know
32 what sort of control or regulations there are there from a health and safety aspect.
33 God forbid if something does happen, I don't know, I don't know who is going to be
34 responsible, but this is going on, it is happening all over the county, and no one

1 seems to be -- I don't know.

2

3 I recently -- I recently made a proposal at our Municipal District meeting here, that
4 we write to the Minister just to express a concern about the development of people
5 coming into the area, and not having the schools and whatever for them, and also, the
6 pressure it's putting on Wicklow County Council housing section, where we have
7 actually people being asked to leave rental accommodation where they can make ten
8 grand a month, the landlord can make ten grand a month instead of two grand a
9 month.

10

11 I put this proposal to the Municipal District here a couple of weeks ago and as an
12 observer pointed out the other five councillors looked at their shoes. I couldn't get a
13 seconder to write to the Minister expressing our concern. And I hope maybe from a
14 Council level here we will write to the Minister and express the concerns of
15 Councillor O'Neill or other councillors there who are really concerned. I mean,
16 listening and looking at things today and for a while there, you know, Fianna Fáil
17 and Fine Gael, and a Green or two, whatever we have there, you know, that they're
18 keeping their heads down, and there's no real movement whatsoever. They don't
19 seem bothered. They throw out a few words here and there but it's a major, major
20 problem.

21

22 So I just want to express that. I want to let the CEO know that I know how her hands
23 are being tied and how she is being told a day or two beforehand, and I don't think it
24 is fair on her, I don't think it's fair on any CEO of the County Council, and I don't
25 think it is fair on the staff. But I think maybe the likes of the -- and the councillors,
26 there's a couple of dozen councillors there from Government parties and surely to
27 God we put this pressure on, because I would be concerned there would be a
28 strategy. When you're putting 30 or 40 -- 41 people in one house in the area here,
29 there's 34 in another house. In four-bed houses? I don't know what sort of
30 regulation -- and it's there to be seen. But I'm telling you now, you know this is true.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

32 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Just on a second point, Cathaoirleach, again, I'd like to
33 maybe encourage the town plan, as soon as possible, for the Blessington area here.
34 We're still waiting on this long awaited -- we are four years out of date with the town

1 plan. We want to get moving. Because there is a big concern here that, you know,
2 for facilities and sporting, and groups, whatever, soccer pitches, whatever, you know
3 the land is there at the moment, the developers are interested in talking to us, but to
4 really get our act together and get this plan in place the sooner the better.

5 Thank you very much.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks, Councillor. Thank you.

7

8 Chief Executive, I would invite you to respond there?

9 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members. I will go
10 back to Councillor Doyle and the Cliff Walk. Yes, I suppose it's probably not ideal
11 that we have -- it straddles two MDs, but you're right, I mean, it's a very important
12 piece of tourism infrastructure for the county, and we will endeavour to get out
13 information, even a one-pager, on what is going on.

14

15 I suppose we've only decided recently, I suppose, to move to CPO because,
16 obviously, we try and negotiate by agreement with the landowners in question, and
17 there have been discussions. I know Councillor Behan asked were there discussions
18 with the landowners. There have been discussions with the landowners around
19 acquiring the land. But I suppose you get one to the table and you get two falling
20 away. And it's just -- it's not a good use of our resources, really. So we've decided to
21 move to a CPO, because then at least it will bring all players to the table, and we will
22 get moving on it, whatever way that will be, by agreement, or if we end up in
23 arbitration or whatever else. But at least it will get the matter moving. But we will
24 communicate with the members on it.

25

26 In relation just to the NTA funding and the staffing, yes, there will be more funding
27 available for extra travel routes. We, I suppose, as a county, and I suppose our
28 neighbouring counties are similar, we are struggling in recruiting staff, particularly in
29 professional technical staff. The country is booming at the moment. We're at full
30 employment. And it's very, very difficult to attract engineering, planning, technical
31 people into local authority at present; particularly, a lot of the funding that we get for
32 staffing is contract-based, and you can get better contracts in the private sector than
33 you can in local government. And that's just the reality of the situation that we are
34 in. But we are working very hard to bridge that gap. We do fully appreciate that

1 there is a gap in what is being delivered in parts of the county in terms of active
2 travel, and we are working to put measures in place to address that.

3

4 In relation to the school closure, we have no role, I suppose, with the ESB on that. I
5 would agree with you that it seems bizarre that a school would have to close to
6 facilitate development. But we don't have a sanctioning or a, you know, a permitting
7 role in that space. If the ESB are doing works, they must deem it of a critical nature
8 that it has to be done during daytime hours. I don't know. But if you want to give
9 me the detail of it, I can certainly raise it with the ESB, because we have other
10 queries to raise with them anyway. I'm happy to do that.

11

12 I will get Joe to talk about the adaptation grants that Councillor Murphy raised, and
13 Leonora might just talk about accessibility for the active travel pieces.

14

15 The Cliff Walk, yeah. The works at Kilruddery development, Councillor Behan, I
16 am not aware of them. We will look into it and find out. It would be very unusual if
17 our district engineer wasn't aware of what was going on on the ground.

18

19 I mean, generally speaking, there would be a requirement for a road opening licence,
20 or it would be conditioned as part of planning. But we will get the detail on it and
21 we will come back to you.

22

23 In relation to the homeless and self-accommodation letter, I am quite shocked by
24 that, myself, I have to say. I think it is completely unacceptable that an
25 establishment wouldn't accept that. But I will get Joe to answer, I suppose, on the
26 detail. I don't see any reason why we couldn't receive -- accept vouched expenditure
27 for that. But I will get Joe just to clarify on that.

28

29 Councillor O'Neill, I suppose, really, we are trying to provide information as we get
30 it in relation to accommodation being sourced. Yes, the broader question of services,
31 as in schools, GPs, chemists, everything is in question. But I suppose what we are
32 being communicated with is about the urgent need for accommodation. And I think
33 other matters, they hope, will be addressed in time. Yes, I do agree that a more
34 holistic approach needs to be taken with regards to when a property is being

1 assessed; it shouldn't be just on the property's merits, it should be on what services
2 are available in the area, and, you know, can that small village accommodate 20 or
3 30 additional schoolchildren, or whatever the case may be in that case.

4

5 It's something that we do raise with the Department, and will continue to raise. It is
6 certainly a concern that is mirrored throughout the country.

7 Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

8 So Leonora is going to come in on the NTA, and then Joe, please.

9 MS EARLS: Yes. Thank you. Councillor Murphy, just in relation to the active
10 travel, so there are certain standards that have to be met with regard to the active
11 travel works, and when it comes to accessibility, so we will always make sure that
12 they comply with them. It's kind of the bus shelters rather than the raised bus stops
13 that are being proposed as part of the bus shelter enhancement scheme. But, again,
14 we will make sure that they -- any works that are done don't create any difficulty
15 with regard to accessibility on the footpath there. And if there's any other query,
16 sure, I can talk to you offline as well.

17 MR LANE: As regards the DPG application, we haven't got the allocation for 2024
18 yet; however, as are usual, there is a general allocation that we can -- that the local
19 authority can undertake works up to a maximum of 65% of their 23 allocations,
20 pending the allocation of the '24 programme. So that means it's seamless. There's no
21 delay regarding it.

22

23 We put new resources in last year, and that will probably reflect a good turnover,
24 which was the expenditure -- the question regarding expenditure. So there shouldn't
25 be many delays. Again, there's always challenges with the schemes. But there
26 shouldn't be any systematic delays in that regard. As regards the voucher
27 expenditure, if the Councillor give me details, I will look at it. I won't guarantee any
28 money, but I will look at it; if he just gives me the details and the expenditure, or get
29 the people to write in to myself, I will look at it.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor, Tom Fortune?

31 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Chief Executive, thanks for
32 your report. Lots of stuff in it. Well covered already by the rest of the members.

33

34 I want to just focus on my contribution on communication and the answering of

1 questions. At our last council meeting, my contribution focused on the -- what I
2 called the existential threat to the councillor role. And in the course of my input,
3 I -- there was about nine questions in my contribution, and they weren't answered.
4 And I think, as a clarification, I came in and asked for them to be answered, and if
5 you couldn't answer them, I said, tell me then where I go for the answers. I'm again
6 now today formally asking that those questions I asked the last day be answered to
7 me.

8

9 I don't bombard you with emails, but I do write, you know, reasonably regularly on
10 key issues. And I have an email that I wrote on the 30th November, another one the
11 4th of December, that I haven't had a response to.

12

13 We had a meeting with the Cathaoirleach, the Chair, back in October, where we
14 discussed a communication approach. My experience, and I know it's the experience
15 of other members as well, or some other members anyway, that it hasn't really
16 changed that much at all.

17

18 And then, since last September, I have been looking for a roads report from the
19 planning file 014910. I have been told on more than one occasion that it's not
20 available to me because of a Garda investigation. But the reality is, and I have
21 checked this out, that it's not sub judice, and it's not before a Court. So it's a public
22 file, so it has to be available on demand.

23

24 And so, what I would ask in relation to that now is, can I see the legal advice that is
25 justifying you refusing to give me that report? And I suppose it raises a fundamental
26 question on top of that: In fact, is there a report in existence? Now, that can be
27 answered without even having to touch the file. But I've checked it out, so I do ask
28 seriously about -- and I want to see the legal advice on that. And I am a public
29 representative. I have been asked by constituents about it. I feel it's my duty to act
30 on that. I do generally act on what I am asked to do. And I think you're frustrating
31 my role as a public representative to go back with information to a constituent.

32 Thanks.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Vincent Blake?

34 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to the CEO for the

1 presentation.

2

3 I see the next item on the agenda there is Taking in Charge of estates. I would just
4 refer back to a very small estate in Shillelagh called Upper Ballard. It was Taking in
5 Charge, in my understanding, quite a number of years ago. At the time, we did point
6 out that there was an issue with the lighting on it. And since then, the lights have
7 been -- to me, anyway -- the new stanchions have been put up and LED lights
8 provided on them as well. But, for some reason, no one would plug it in. And it is
9 frustrating for the few people that's there in new houses, that they're growing up
10 with -- children are growing up there with the lights not completed in it.

11

12 I know I brought up there about the -- about the active travel and the bus shelters. I
13 just ask our own Chair that we could put it on the agenda of the Baltinglass district
14 next time. Because a number of bus shelters have been provided in Aughrim and
15 occur along the route from Arklow to Carlow, and I just want to know, maybe could
16 we liaise with Dermot Graham in the Tinahely office to see how we can progress a
17 number of more bus shelters on that route to Carlow.

18

19 And finally, just in relation to the lithium and the Blackstairs Mountains situation.
20 We have been attending meetings in Donegal for the last number of years regards
21 that particular issue. We have been liaising with the company and with the local
22 people there as well. It is an emotive issue in the area, no doubt about it. But, look
23 it, we are continuously talking to them. I have, myself, here over the years talked to
24 the Department, the Planning Department here and the Department of Environment
25 here as well, and each time I am being referred on to the Department of Natural
26 Resources. And that's where the licence are being granted on a regular basis with
27 regards to it. But certainly, it's an emotive issue in the area. But, in terms of
28 continuing to represent the people's views on it, we are doing that on a regular basis.
29 Thanks, Chair.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

31 Councillor Mary Kavanagh, apologies for the delay, I know you are coming in just
32 for a point of clarity, which you have been waiting for quite a while. So go ahead

33 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Yeah, I don't want to raise any new issues.

34 I just wanted to clarify that I am not interested, per se, in the mineral exploration

1 rights of the company. I am really only concerned about the potential effects,
2 hazardous effects, on the water table around that area, and just to notify -- or just to
3 ask the Council to please intervene to make sure that they're on top of that as a
4 potential problem, not mineral right exploration, per se, just the potential damage to
5 the water in the area.

6 Thank you.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. And Councillor John Snell.

8 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just to thank Emer for the
9 comprehensive report as always. And I have just three issues to seek clarification
10 around.

11

12 One is for the community of Ashford, and to see is there any developments in
13 regards to providing playground facilities? We all know the long, drawn-out issues
14 with the current playground, and how it's been locked to the public for a year and a
15 half now. So it is just to see has anything else transpired.

16

17 I know the last update we got from our Chief Executive, there was expressions of
18 interest if the public knew of alternative sites or otherwise. And just maybe the
19 Director of Service could give us a brief update.

20

21 In regards to, Cathaoirleach, parking fees. Parking fees throughout County Wicklow
22 bring in 2.5 million into the coffers of this local authority, and made up of that is
23 20% from parking fines. And I am not going to go over old ground, because, indeed,
24 Councillor Erika Doyle from Bray and Councillor Mary Kavanagh from East
25 Wicklow have both articulated perfectly over the number of weeks in regards to the
26 issues that the new change has brought in.

27

28 So what I want to raise is: Something that's fundamentally -- it's a material change to
29 what was already there. And I know a lot of it was brought in for the betterment of
30 the public. But when public representatives are kept in the dark on something like
31 that, it's going to -- unfortunately, we're asked the questions and we don't have the
32 answers. And that is something that was being rolled out throughout the county in
33 regards to the change. I know about the new machines. But the reality is that it did
34 lead to a lot of confusion throughout the districts, and I just felt that that was

1 something that we could have dealt with in-house, in here, in this forum, or in our
2 Municipal Districts; and unfortunately, we weren't given the opportunity. So just
3 food for thought for the future.

4

5 And then a question in regards to the park & ride in the Rathnew Ashford park &
6 ride. We had a presentation here on the 3rd of October 2022 from the National
7 Transport Authority, and they were going through alternative sites. And indeed I
8 know myself and Councillor Shay Cullen had many questions on the day in regards
9 to the -- the various sites that they were talking about.

10

11 You mentioned earlier that they're in the process of going out to tender. We haven't
12 been updated, certainly through Municipal District or full Council, in regard to the
13 preferred site or what they're going out to tender on which site, and it is just to seek a
14 little bit of clarification to see has the site been chosen.

15 Thank you.

16 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Chief Executive. That's all the
17 questions, so I will ask you to respond, please.

18 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members.

19 Councillor Fortune, I suppose, I am sorry that you feel that communication hasn't
20 improved since we met and discussed it. I don't know if it's correspondence to
21 myself you're referring to on the 30th of November and the 4th of December. If it's
22 about the matter of Charlesland, I suppose, we spoke about it, but I didn't reply to
23 you formally. I am happy to correct that.

24

25 Our advice -- my advice from our criminal legal adviser is that, once the matter is
26 under investigation by the Gardaí, we're not entitled to give that information to
27 anybody. It's preserved for the Gardaí. Some of the information that is requested is
28 publicly available on various websites, and that's the position on it at the moment.

29

30 In relation to the questions that you raised at the last Council meeting; I am happy to
31 reply to them. If you want to submit them to me in writing, I will reply to you in
32 writing. That's no problem, I will do that. I don't remember the nine off the top of
33 my head, so you might have to refresh my memory. I know the tenor of it, but just
34 the detail of it. I am quite happy to reply in writing to those.

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In relation to Councillor Blake about the lights, and not being completed, I might get Leonora to come in on that, and the bus shelter as well.

Councillor Kavanagh, yes, your clarification is noted. I will write to the Department about the water table and the quality, and the issues around quality and pollution of the water table, and what may potentially happen.

I will ask Michael to come in on the playground in Ashford for Councillor Snell. And I might get Lorraine just to make a comment on the parking situation.

So thank you, Cathaoirleach

MR NICHOLSON: Cathaoirleach, we did get a couple of people contact us about suitable sites, or sites that they thought were suitable, but we checked them out and they weren't, for various reasons. Remoteness. Not suitable for playgrounds.

We have also had discussions with existing developers and possible potential developers about going down that route of getting a playground. So it remains very much, Councillor, at the top of our agenda.

And again, if any member is aware of any site in -- that must be in the vicinity of Ashford, within walking distance, with footpaths, it must be flat, it must have the proper planning, and that rules out a lot of sites; but certainly, if you are aware of any site that might be available, come and talk to us. In the meantime, we'll keep our options open.

We have had a couple of very, very positive conversations with potential developers who we reached out to, so there might be something happening there. I will keep the members posted on that. Thank you.

MS EARLS: Thank you. Councillor Blake, yes, there's an ESB connection issue with that site in Shillelagh, and we have been chasing the ESB on it, so we will chase them again to try and get the matter fully resolved.

In relation to the bus shelters, so we have engaged with the NTA and we have pointed out to them that there are some shelters that have been provided. So it's just

1 a question of funding by the elected members in some districts. So we are just
2 waiting for them to come back with further details of what their requirements will be.
3 So we will engage with the districts, and we'll keep the districts informed in relation
4 to that.

5

6 Councillor Snell, so the tender documents relates to the park & ride for Fassaroe,
7 which did come before the members for a Part 8. We will bring the Part 8 for the
8 park & ride for Rathnew Ashford to the members before we move any further with
9 it. So it'll either be to the full Council or to the Wicklow MD district.

10 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Do you have a site picked yet?

11 MS EARLS: The site, you may remember when the NTA team came down here,
12 they had a kind of rating system of the sites, so we're just waiting for them to come
13 back to see if they have finished that exercise.

14 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks a million.

15 MS GALLAGHER: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yes, so, as you know, Bray Municipal
16 District is responsible for the overseeing of the car parking contracts throughout the
17 four municipal districts of Bray, Arklow, Greystones and Wicklow. So a new
18 contract was entered into for the operation of the new and the installation of the new
19 parking meters. So commitment was given to the elected members that a significant
20 percentage of the parking meters would be changed to facilitate card and cash
21 payments, because it wasn't possible to adapt the old machines to accept the card
22 payments; and, therefore, the machines were being replaced on an incremental basis.

23

24 But as you're aware, issues were raised by elected members and I know member of
25 the public in relation to the requirement to input car registration numbers in cars in
26 car parks. And this would not be unusual in other parts of the country. It is -- and
27 while it is a new functionality, the wardens were instructed not to ticket people
28 where they didn't input it -- ticket a vehicle where the registration was wrongly
29 inputted, or where a ticket was remaining on it, and shared with another vehicle.

30

31 So look it, I hear what the elected members are saying. Members of the public made
32 their views known. Elected members, you made your views known. So that whole
33 functionality has been reversed. So, look, we will keep it under review, we'll
34 monitor it, and we'll come back to the elected members in the future.

1 Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Fortune, sorry, your light is actually on now.

3 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yes. Just on a point of clarification, Chair. Thanks.
4 Just coming back, Chief Executive, on the -- my question on the planning file. My
5 understanding is that what you are saying to me is not, from my understanding,
6 accurate. It's the same answer I am getting all the time. So I did ask in my
7 contribution today, can I see the legal advice that's saying that that's the situation?
8 And the other part of it I asked as well is, in fact, I asked directly, and I have done
9 this in writing as well: Is there actually a roads report on the file?

10 MS O'GORMAN: The legal advice that I have is privileged advice to the Office of
11 the Chief Executive. It's a matter for the Chief Executive. It's just -- it's a matter that
12 I have to consider, and my predecessors have considered.

13

14 So I am not in a position to share it with you. We have clarified the position for you
15 several times on the matter. You may not be satisfied with the answer that you are
16 receiving from us, but that is my advice, and my advice is of the predecessor before
17 me.

18

19 It is a live criminal investigation, and my advice is that it gets raised with the Gardaí.
20 I cannot provide any further information on it at this point in time,
21 Councillor Fortune.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Fortune, I think the Chief Executive has made
23 herself clear.

24 COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: It is a clarification point I have to get an answer to it.
25 That doesn't make any sense at all. I am a public representative. There isn't a live
26 court case going on. There isn't a legal case going on. There's purely investigation.
27 It is a public file.

28

29 Now, I don't understand why you, as the Chief Executive, cannot let me, as a public
30 representative, see the legal advice that you're relying on to tell me I can't see a file
31 or I can't get a report from a file. That makes absolutely no sense.

32

33 Now, you can fob me off until the cows come home on it, but I believe you are
34 fundamentally wrong here in what you are doing, and I would love to know why you

1 are doing it.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Patsy Glennon?

3 COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I didn't intend speaking at
4 all, but I feel that I have to clarify something that my friend, Councillor O'Neill, has
5 said earlier. He talked about a municipal meeting in Blessington where all five
6 councillors looked at their feet. That is totally untrue. We didn't agree with his
7 motion. I certainly made a value -- what I thought was a valuable contribution, that
8 the matter was coming before the Government the following day, and that the
9 Government was best placed to deal with some of the issues he was raising, rather
10 than anyone beating the drum in Blessington about these issues. My friend,
11 Councillor Timmins, made a valuable contribution, as did the other members. I just
12 feel that I have to correct the record because it's totally wrong --

13 COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: That is not correct.

14 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Neill, please don't interrupt. Okay. Thank you
15 very much. Okay, members, thank you for your contribution. We are going to move
16 on to item number 10: To consider in accordance with Section 11 of the Roads Act,
17 1993 and Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) the
18 Taking in Charge of the following estates.

19

20 And just so the members are aware, I do require a proposer and a seconder for each
21 estate, individually.

22

23 So Dromkeen in Wicklow, looking for a proposer?

24 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Proposed.

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Proposed by John Snell. Seconded by Councillor Gail
26 Dunne. What did I say? Sorry.

27

28 Meadowview, Arklow. Proposed by Pat Fitzgerald. Seconded by
29 Councillor Tommy Annesley.

30 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: Excuse me. Just for clarification, it is Meadowvale.
31 Okay? Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. I'd second that proposal.

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes. Have we spelled it wrong? Did I say it wrong?

33 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: No, you said Meadowview.

34 CATHAOIRLEACH: Oh, sorry. I'm terribly sorry, Councillor.

1 COUNCILLOR ANNESLEY: No, no, I totally understand. You're forgiven.

2 CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem. I am trying to watch out for all the hands. And
3 The Orchard in Greystones. Councillor Stephen Stokes and Councillor Gerry Walsh.
4 Okay. Is that agreed by all? (Agreed.)

5 Agreed. Thank you.

6 Okay. The next item is to note the County Wicklow Road Safety Plan, 2023 to 2030.
7 A copy was attached. And Linda is going to be speaking on this matter. Thank you,
8 Linda.

9 LINDA: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and members. The Road Safety Plan is County
10 Wicklow's second Road Safety Plan and covers the period up to 2030. It has been
11 prepared by the Road Safety Working Together Committee, which is made up of key
12 stakeholders; Gardaí, the Road Safety Authority, TII, and officials from Wicklow
13 County Council.

14

15 The plan is in line with the Road Safety Authority's national strategy titled Vision
16 Zero, which aims to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on Irish roads
17 by 50% before 2030.

18

19 In order to achieve this figure, both plans are led by a safe systems approach, which
20 is viewed as best practice globally in the delivery of road safety strategies. The safe
21 system approach recognises that, while road safety education, training and
22 engineering design can reduce the number of road collisions, human error cannot be
23 eliminated.

24

25 It, therefore, aims to reduce the likelihood of a collision occurring, and, if one does
26 occur, to ensure that the road users involved will not be killed or seriously injured.
27 Twenty-three actions are outlined in the plan under four safe systems priority
28 intervention areas, which are safe roads and roadsides, safe speeds, safe road use,
29 safe and healthy modes of transport. This Road Safety Plan will be evaluated on an
30 annual basis and a report presented to the SPC. Thank you.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks very much, Linda. I am just going to open it out to
32 the floor. There's no more people looking to speak.

33 Councillor Edward Timmins?

34 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Thanks, Chairman. Just briefly. I read this report, and

1 it's very commendable. A lot of detail in it. But I just think a lot of this road safety
2 boils down to just a couple of things that are, you know, big ticket items, and a lot of
3 them are out of our control. But let's make it public and give our opinion, and a
4 couple of the items I'm referring to, I think we would all agree on this, and I have
5 expressed it in other forums, it's just, to improve road safety, we need more speed
6 vans. It's definitely reduced in the last five, six years. We need more Garda
7 presence on the roads. I know there's a shortage of Gardaí, and that's a whole other
8 issue again, outside our control at this Council, but I just think it needs to be said.
9 They're the big ticket items.

10
11 And it is clear as well the RSA have taken their eye off the ball, in terms of road
12 safety, and some of the excuses they give for the massive -- the considerable increase
13 in road deaths last year are fairly pathetic, in my opinion.

14
15 And just closer to home, I know there's a kind of a -- how do you say -- that the
16 programme for Government, two-thirds, one-third public transport roads; and, by the
17 way, roads carry a lot of public transport. Buses are the main public transport in this
18 country. But yet roads are not getting the funding that they warrant, in my opinion.

19
20 The amount of money going to TII, I think, has reduced in the last couple of years,
21 from my conversations with senior people in there. So -- and in particular in this
22 county, the guys could speak from the N11 on the other side, but on the N81, the
23 dual carriageway has been shelved, completely put to one side, and that's a big
24 contributor to road safety. Motorways and dual carriages are much, much safer than
25 single carriageways. And we all know the history of the N81, one of the most
26 dangerous roads in the country. But they're the main points I would see in terms of
27 road safety in this county.

28 Thanks.

29 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

30 Councillor Rory O'Connor?

31 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: Thanks very much for the report. There's just a few
32 points I wanted to make overall.

33
34 I think, firstly, as a Council, I think we're missing an opportunity here. Because

1 recently, we've made some huge changes to our roads, with changing the speed limits
2 and adding periodic speed limits overall, and it does get a mention within the report.
3 But I think there should be an emphasis on the research for County Wicklow, how
4 that -- these changes impact us, and, you know, if it does reduce car crashes or
5 anything sort of around those lines.

6

7 So I just think there's a really big -- there's a missed opportunity for this kind of
8 whole new change across the Council, across Wicklow, to take full advantage of it
9 research-wise.

10

11 And secondly, just about the annual collision cluster, it says here that TII carry out
12 annual collision cluster analysis along the national routes and identify all sections of
13 high collisions to Wicklow County Council.

14

15 In County Wicklow, only 4% of our roads are national roads, so does the Council
16 then do the analysis for the other percentage of the roads when it comes to collisions,
17 or is there just no analysis around collisions on the other roads around Wicklow?
18 Because I would be interested in seeing the stats around that.

19 And that's all. Thank you

20 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

21 Councillor Erika Doyle?

22 COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Linda, for that.
23 It's nice to see you again. We miss you in Bray.

24

25 Yes, thanks for the report. I think there's a couple of things, as Councillor O'Connor
26 said, that we can control, and then there's a couple of things that we can't control.

27 But I note in the report that it states that one of the things that's vital for any
28 suggestions or regulations or attitudes to be successful is political commitment, and
29 that's not just political commitment on a national stage. That's political commitment
30 on a local stage as well.

31

32 We are probably some of the people who are best informed about road safety issues
33 and dangerous areas in our districts, and I think sometimes we need to be brave when
34 we address this; because some of them can be, on the face of it, a little bit unpopular.

1 And what I mean by unpopular is, you might get three or four angry emails because
2 you might be talking about doing something to a parking space or, you know,
3 adjusting a speed limit. But most people will actually support it. Most people want
4 to feel safe. They want their children to feel safe. They want to know that they can
5 get from A to B without putting themselves at risk. So I think that that political
6 bravery needs to come from local and national government.

7
8 Just one of the other things is enforcement. So enforcement is absolutely key, and
9 we need to make that very, very clear to our Garda Síochána, who I know do the best
10 that they can. I hope they do. I am sure they would say they do. But we can put up
11 all the signs and speed limits and road improvements that we want, but if there is
12 nobody there to enforce people who are breaking the law by undertaking dangerous
13 behaviour, then really it's pointless, you know? We can't enforce -- and this is what I
14 say to a lot of people who contact me. Like, I'm a councillor. We can't enforce -- we
15 can enforce in public areas of parking; we can give tickets. But we can't enforce,
16 you know, any kind of dangerous driving.

17
18 So I think that's massive. That relationship needs to be -- it needs to work. And then
19 finally, just to say that I do welcome the speed reduction around the schools, and I
20 have seen some of the signage has gone up already, and I welcome the rest of the
21 signage.

22
23 Some people would argue in Bray that you'd be lucky to get up to 30 kilometres
24 around the schools, because it's just choc-a-bloc. But I think what I hope it will do,
25 outside of the actual speed of the cars, is encourage a thinking about driver behaviour
26 around children, around vulnerable young people.

27
28 You know, the hierarchy of road users puts pedestrians first, and cyclists. Car
29 drivers are protected by their cars, in most cases, and the people who come off the
30 worst of it are people and cyclists. And if we look at the size of our little children
31 going to school and the size of some of the cars, I mean, they wouldn't stand a
32 chance.

33
34 So, you know, it's up to us as well, as individuals, to think about what is important to

1 us. Is it getting there that minute quicker or is it getting there alive and making sure
2 that everybody else is safe as well?

3 But I welcome the steps towards that, and the conversation that we're having around
4 it.

5 Thank you.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Linda, are you okay if I take a few
7 more?

8 LINDA: Yes.

9 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Shay Cullen?

10 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks, Linda, for your
11 presentation; short and straight to the point, which is always welcome.

12

13 Road safety, I suppose I come at this from a rural point of view. It's definitely one of
14 the biggest issues that people would bring to me on, look, a weekly basis. And it
15 really is down to driver behaviour. And we can put all the measures we want into
16 place, but we have to try and change driver behaviour. Yes, Garda presence will
17 make a difference. But there are other things that could make a difference. One
18 simple improvement that could be made is the roadside verges and cutting of hedges
19 to give better visibility.

20

21 I think it's something -- we obviously can't cut ditches and so on, I think, after the 1st
22 of March to the end of August, and that's the time of the year we have most of the
23 growth, and it's the time of the year, particularly in rural areas, that there's a lot of
24 overhanging bushes and heavy grass and so on, that does reduce visibility. And I
25 think it is something that we definitely need to have a better look at in those more
26 rural areas.

27

28 In terms of housing estates, I often get queries, can we not put more ramps in
29 housing estates? But the reality is, 99 times out of 100, the people who speed in
30 housing estates are the residents of those housing estates. It's not other people going
31 into joyride. It's the residents themselves of housing estates that are rushing, they're
32 not maybe focused on the speed limit, and they're taking risks.

33

34 And again, I think it's something that needs to be looked at. I concur in terms of the

1 school periodic signage. But again, I have to say, the problem -- a lot of problems
2 around schools is parents who are maybe under pressure, they're late, they're rushing,
3 they're dropping off kids, and there's just, you know, a load of particular issues at the
4 one point in a particularly tight area around the school that can cause concern in
5 terms of, you know, speed, and it is something we need to take, I suppose,
6 cognisance of.

7

8 One final point I would like to make is, as a Council, can we do a countywide
9 campaign to slow down? I'm not talking about a national slowdown; I am talking
10 about a Wicklow slowdown. And maybe look at doing this maybe three, four times
11 in the year, you know, to show leadership in terms of what we can do to try and get
12 the message out for people to slow down. Because, at the end of the day, as I said at
13 the beginning of my presentation, at the end of the day here, this is down to driver
14 behaviour, and no matter what signs we put up, we have to get through to the driver
15 of a vehicle that you must slow down.

16 Thank you.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

18 Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

19 COUNCILLOR KAVANAGH: Thanks, Chair. Well, my points have more or less
20 been said by a lot of people here. It is one of the things I am contacted very often
21 about by concerned parents. They're really terrified on behalf of their children.
22 Even at schools, and even at pedestrian crossings, it's almost like, well, I'll go before
23 the child puts his or her foot on the pedestrian crossing.

24

25 There's this -- just this absolute appetite for speed and recklessness out there. I don't
26 even know if it belongs to a particular age cohort or not, but, in the very first week of
27 this year, we had something like nine road deaths, nine road fatalities to start off this
28 year. So that gives you an idea of what a huge problem it is.

29

30 When I was probably in secondary school, there was a huge campaign about the Safe
31 Cross Code. It was imbedded in everybody's brain. I could actually probably sing it
32 now, but I won't. But it was one of these things that you never forget. You know,
33 not only do drivers have to be careful, but the people crossing the roads have to be
34 careful. Even going around the town today, and a lot of people saying, oh, put in a

1 pedestrian crossing here, and put in a pedestrian crossing here. It isn't even always
2 that simple. Some roads are too short, some roads are too narrow, some roads
3 wouldn't give enough room for parking. So it is not always possible to put in
4 pedestrian crossings.

5

6 But the amount of people who begin to cross a road without looking left or right is
7 actually frightening. Some of them have earphones in. But they just don't even look.
8 And the driver has to always anticipate, which is only fair, but the pedestrians should
9 also be anticipating danger as well. And they just seem to be walking around with
10 their head in a cloud or something.

11

12 So I think we need to have a big campaign, nationally, because it's happening all
13 over the country, it is not just happening here. We have big advertising campaigns at
14 Christmas to do with drink driving, parents, bereaved parents whose children have
15 been killed giving heartbreaking interviews about what happened, and it really drives
16 the message home.

17

18 But the biggest killer on the road today is speed. It isn't drink driving, and it isn't
19 drug driving. It is literally speed. Going around corners too fast. Not taking due
20 care and attention driving through towns. I have been crossing pedestrian crossings
21 myself, with green lights, and there's cars rocketing up to the pedestrian crossing.
22 And I am -- I can't get across the road quick enough.

23

24 So I think, yes, we can do something as a county. I think Councillor Cullen is right,
25 we should concentrate maybe on a countywide initiative. But I would really love to
26 see a nationwide campaign, just driving home the message of speed, speed, speed.
27 Slow down. That's really all I want to say on it.

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much.

29 Linda, do you want to come in on some of those?

30 LINDA: I will, yes.

31 Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members, for all your comments --

32 CATHAOIRLEACH: Just your mic there, Linda.

33 Linda: Thank you for all your comments and suggestions, and I will bring all of
34 those back to the Road Safety Working Together Committee. We're working with

1 Inspector Byrne at the moment on doing a year-long rota of campaigns. So you will
2 hear more about that in the coming weeks.

3

4 But Councillor Timmins, your comments are noted, and thank you for those. I don't
5 think you had any questions, but I will bring your comments back to the working
6 group.

7 Councillor O'Connor, you were talking about research on the speed limit review.
8 Hopefully, this time next year, when we are doing our first evaluation of the plan, we
9 can look back at the new speed limits that are in place or will be all in place by the
10 end of February, and report on those to see the effect.

11

12 You also asked about, does Wicklow County Council carry out inspections on the
13 collision data from the other roads, the other 96% in the county. And yes, we would,
14 with the district engineers, and look at the condition of the roads. And that's what
15 informs our plan of works each year.

16

17 Councillor Doyle, again, thank you for your comments, and I will bring those back to
18 the committee.

19

20 Councillor Cullen, yes, that is a very good idea about the local slowdown campaign,
21 and I will bring that back and discuss it with the inspector as well.

22

23 And Councillor Kavanagh, also about the national campaign on speed, I will raise
24 that at our next meeting with the Road Safety Authority representative. And, as you
25 say about the road deaths, this year I think they are up to 20 now, they are, as of this
26 week.

27 Did I cover everything there?

28 CATHAOIRLEACH: A few more speakers.

29 Councillor Gerry Walsh?

30 COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Linda, for the
31 presentation.

32 As a member of the Joint Policing Committee, road safety and traffic collisions are
33 something that comes up at our meetings, obviously, on a regular basis. I welcome
34 the plan, and its emphasis on the safe systems approach, education, training and

1 engineering. And I am also aware that there is a road safety committee that meet
2 quarterly, I believe, with Gardaí to look at the accident -- identify the accident-prone
3 locations and look at engineering solutions.

4

5 But look, some previous speakers mentioned about enforcement, and I know
6 Minister Chambers is bringing through new speed limit reviews through the
7 Oireachtas at the moment, and hopefully -- but at the end of the day, enforcement is
8 key. And the roads policing units have been run -- you know, in terms of numbers,
9 have been reduced. But I think there's an emphasis again to increase those units.
10 But again, it's so important.

11

12 But look, I think young people on rural roads, the statistics, unfortunately, point out
13 that, you know, the majority of fatalities have been young people at weekends on
14 rural roads. And, as one who has attended more accidents than I care to remember in
15 my previous working life as a garda, and horrific scenes, and, you know, when you
16 have to go to a house in the early hours of the morning and tell parents that their only
17 child has been killed on the road, it is not easy, and the sheer devastation left, you
18 know, that scene, is something that remains with you.

19

20 And, as I say, statistics. We hear the numbers, you know, so many killed, and all
21 these injuries, but, behind all those statistics, there's a family, you know, left
22 devastated, bereaved, and there's people left with horrific injuries for the rest of their
23 days.

24

25 So education is key, driver behaviour, you know, we see it all the time when we go
26 out on the road ourselves, the behaviour of other drivers, and we say, you know,
27 what are they thinking of? But I suppose, you can't put an old head on young
28 shoulders, and some people think they're invincible when they get behind the wheel.

29

30 We saw -- we heard of the horrific accident in Carlow only a few weeks ago, and I
31 heard Superintendent Farrell, you know, explain to the media the scene that his
32 members had to deal with on that occasions, and three young lives cut down in the
33 prime of their lives.

34

1 So that message has to be got out. Education is key, in conjunction, obviously, with
2 the engineering approach and the enforcement.

3 Thank you.

4 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

5 Councillor Avril Cronin?

6 COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thank you very much for the
7 presentation. I'm not going to speak too long, because most of the topics have
8 actually been covered.

9

10 But as my fellow Councillor said, road safety and speeding is one of the issues that
11 keeps reoccurring again and again, and as our other colleagues have said, no matter
12 how many signs we put up, it is down to driver behaviour and enforcement.

13 But I think one of the biggest issues I have in my area is speeding on the rural roads.
14 I know everybody wants to have extra signage and ramps and -- you know, but there
15 is only so much that we can do as a Council with regard to speeding on our roads,
16 and I do think that this is something that we need to continue to press and continue to
17 work on with our local Gardaí.

18

19 I know it comes up time and time again at our JPC, and I do appreciate the work that
20 they are doing, but also, I understand that they are stretched of resources. But I do
21 think enforcement is a huge issue.

22

23 One issue that bothers me, as a driver, is the lack of visibility for pedestrians on our
24 roads. I live in a rural area. Most of my driving is around rural areas. And we see
25 people out walking, which is great to see people getting active, but, at the end of the
26 day, they really should be wearing high-visibility jackets if they're going to be out on
27 rural roads. It's a massive issue. Unfortunately, we don't have the infrastructure to
28 have public lighting on rural roads, so I do think that that's maybe a campaign that
29 we could start up locally, along with our JPC, to ensure that people are aware of the
30 dangers of walking on our roads, to be seen when they are out walking.

31

32 And Councillor Cullen raised the issue of roadside verges. This is one of the topics
33 that comes up, and I know it is going to come up over the coming months when we
34 come into the summer season.

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In our rural areas, our roads are so small, when the hedges are overgrown, it is very hard to see. I get it an awful lot from school bus drivers contact me on a regular basis, saying that, is there anything that we can do, because they can't see on the roads? And I know now, coming into the summer months, as farmers are going to start their harvesting and their silage, it is going to come up again. The machines are so big, our roads are so small, and when you have hedges overgrown, it is a massive issue. But again, we are always told that it is the responsibility of the owner. But I just think we could do more. And maybe this is something that you could look at as well going forward.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Members, I am just going to look for a small extension. I don't think we are going to need it, but we have only one or two items left on the agenda, but maybe -- is that okay?

Councillor Behan proposed, and Councillor Rory O'Connor seconded. As I said, I don't think we will need it, but just till we complete the agenda.

Councillor Lourda Scott?

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, and thanks for the presentation.

Reducing the speeds and bringing in the 30K speed limits was something I was very heavily involved in promoting during the recent county speed limit review. And somewhat ironically, I guess, it got massive support, bringing in the 30K speed limits, and particularly around the schools in my locality, the district, and there was a huge amount of public submissions onto the speed limit review from constituents in Greystones District.

I say it somewhat ironically, because I am also plagued with issues of speeding and people now ignoring the new speed limits in my area, and, like, for my colleagues that are with me in the district, I think I have brought up the issue of road safety and speeding issues on Blacklion, where three schools -- there's two primary schools, one secondary school, and two creches located. I've brought it up at our district meeting, I think probably every meeting since I have been elected, and I also bring up the issue at our police committee meetings.

1 And I've witnessed there, like, with my own two eyes an example of cars. I can't say
2 if they were speeding. They certainly were going fast. But breaking green
3 pedestrian lights when there was a toddler, like, actually on the pedestrian crossing,
4 and, literally, for the grace of God, there was, like, deaths there.

5

6 We have got funding to do some engineering works around the schools. That's
7 progressing slowly. But I can't -- what I want you to bring back is, I can't tell you
8 how often that I have raised the issue of enforcement, that all it would take is a
9 Garda car one morning during school pickup or school put-down, and a few fines to
10 be issued. There's also issues with cars parking illegally there as well. And people
11 would suddenly, very suddenly, start paying attention to what speed they are doing.

12

13 And that's just an example. It's not just restricted to that road in my area. It is
14 replicated all over the place. And my own feeling is that driver behaviour seems to
15 have gotten worse since Covid. I don't know why, but just people seem to be more
16 impatient and more aggressive in their behaviour when they're behind a wheel.

17

18 The second thing I wanted to bring to you was, again, it's been said to me quite often,
19 and again, from people who have been really supportive of the 30K speed limits
20 coming in, is that they are asking, would the Council not do like an awareness
21 campaign? More than an awareness campaign. A sort of a positive campaign, going
22 that this is a really positive thing that's been brought in, so really, to continue that
23 buy-in, but also really to flag it to people.

24

25 And again, I literally had an email come in this afternoon of somebody asking for
26 additional signs going -- people don't know there's a 30. You know, they're
27 not -- people aren't paying attention to them. So again, if there was something that
28 could be done around that, and just to reiterate the piece on enforcement. Thank
29 you.

30 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

31 And finally, Councillor John Snell?

32 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks, Linda, for the
33 presentation. I suppose, first and foremost, it's just to acknowledge in regards to the
34 Safe Routes to School programme and the work around it, and the way it was fully

1 supported here within the Council chambers. And I did note with interest that
2 Minister Harris, in November, where he was calling on Wicklow County Council to
3 implement works as soon as possible around St. Laurence O'Toole National School
4 in the Lough Dan Road in Roundwood.

5
6 And the reason I note it with interest is because, obviously, it was works that was
7 going to be done irrespective, and public representatives had raised that at many
8 forums.

9
10 But the reality is that Wicklow has a broad diversity to the road network. It's both
11 urban, rural, we have the Sally Gap and we have the Wicklow Gap. And a lot of
12 counties don't have that sort of road network. And certainly, not to the scale that we
13 have.

14
15 So I think our roads section do tremendous work, with the funding we have. So I
16 would note to Minister Harris, that if he wants to give extra funding here, we would
17 gladly use it. County Wicklow would be glad to implement it, as we have to date in
18 other projects.

19
20 I want to say, in regards to years ago, campaigns were ran, obviously, in regards to
21 drink driving. But the reality now is drug driving is a major issue. And An Garda
22 Síochána have made this perfectly clear at any meetings that we have held with
23 them, and certainly it is something that has to be factored in, that 2024 has
24 been -- had a horrendous start with fatalities, nationally.

25
26 And unfortunately, I think, going forward, this is something that needs to be tackled
27 in the same way that drink driving was tackled; drug driving is a major, major issue.
28 But just to support Linda and her team, and just to say that a lot of the work that they
29 are doing is appreciated on the ground by the constituents out there, and to say that,
30 if there's funding, extra founding that Minister Harris has, we will take it.

31 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Linda, do you want to respond to any
32 of that?

33 LINDA: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you again, members. Thanks for your
34 support, Councillor Snell. And again, I will take your comments back to the

1 committee.

2

3 Councillor Scott, I will certainly have a word with the inspector and see if we can do
4 that, have a patrol car up around there. As you know, it's not possible to have
5 somebody there all the time, every day, but certainly one occasion anyway. I will
6 discuss that with her. And communication, or PR campaign in relation to the
7 30-kilometre speed limits, particular outside schools, that is something that we would
8 be looking at doing in the section towards the end of the month here, when we're sure
9 that all the signs are up and working and that. And again, thank you for your
10 comments.

11

12 Councillor Walsh, again, yes, agree with all you said, and I will take it back to the
13 committee.

14

15 Councillor Cronin, you raised the issue of the roadside verges and that. While, after
16 the 1st of March, where we can't -- the landowner can't cut his own ditch or
17 whatever, while it is their responsibility, we can, for safety reasons, compel them to
18 do it. So like, if you want to talk to me again about -- I'm also working the roads
19 section here, so if you want to talk to me about notices, please do.

20 I think I have covered everything there.

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's grand, Linda. Thank you. Leonora, you wanted to
22 come in?

23 MS EARLS: Yes. Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Members, I just want to thank Linda
24 for all that she does. There's been a huge amount of work has been done putting that
25 safety plan together, and she has developed very strong relationships with An Garda
26 Síochána within that committee. And just her team as well. Like, up to most
27 recently last Friday, she ran a campaign on social media about the very things you're
28 talking about here today, which is driver behaviour and adapting to the different road
29 conditions that they're working on, and she's worked with that.

30

31 She's also worked closely with the fire service in relation to having an event around
32 creating an awareness within schools and with the members of the public.

33

34 And just so you don't feel left out, you will have the joy of another speed limit

1 review bylaws coming to you very soon.

2

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you so much, Linda. Thank you and the team.

4

5 The next item we have is to receive a presentation from Fred Verdier on the strategic
6 development of tourism. So Fred.

7 I will get you to turn on your mic there, Fred. Thanks a million.

8

9 MR VERDIER: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach, Councillors.

10

11 So I will give you a quick update on the strategic -- Wicklow County Council is
12 obviously involved in strategically developing tourism in the Council. So Fáilte
13 Ireland is now working on the destination development for County Wicklow, and
14 that's very welcome. So there's an opportunity for us to influence the narrative for
15 Wicklow.

16

17 The Glendalough plan, master plan, was launched recently. Another opportunity for
18 using Glendalough as a hub for not only an enhanced experience at Glendalough, but
19 also a hub for the rest of the county. Greenways, and lots of trails. There's about 60
20 plus trails that are registered by Sports Ireland in Wicklow. And a lot of work on the
21 greenways. Frustrating work. Blessington, Shillelagh and Arklow, and then the trail
22 along the coast from Greystones to Wicklow town. And then the blueway to give
23 focus on the shore of County Wicklow. So that is being worked at Council level.

24 But I will do is -- can I move the -- how do I move the slide?

25 CATHAOIRLEACH: Just let Teresa know.

26 MR VERDIER: If you don't mind, yes. So I will focus on what we are working on
27 at the moment in the Department and the various themes and brands that we want to
28 push Wicklow through.

29

30 So EcoTrail Wicklow. EcoTrail that was set up in 2019, the first event, is one of the
31 only few events, outdoor activity events, that is sponsored by -- supported and
32 sponsored by Fáilte Ireland. And we have the sponsorship up to 2025 for review. So
33 a lot of opportunities.

34

1 The event itself is doing very well. We have got 1,400 participants representing 47
2 different nationalities. A lot of them did travel for the event itself, and it is working
3 very well. But, for me, EcoTrail was always like a brochure to promote Wicklow as
4 a destination for outdoor activities. And it is doing just that, with the support of
5 Fáilte Ireland. So we increased our partnership with Tourism Ireland Network
6 around Europe and beyond. That resulted in extensive international promotion.

7
8 We've welcomed influencers and journalists from all over the -- well, Europe,
9 mostly, and the U.S. for the event. And really, for me, this is a tool that I use to
10 develop or promote Wicklow as the outdoor destination in Ireland. We do entertain
11 more people than anywhere else in the country every weekend. We are that
12 destination. We're not just recognised as such yet. And this is what we are working
13 on.

14
15 Which leads very nicely into our main brand for Wicklow. Wicklow outdoors. So
16 obviously, we have the trails. Now we're working on cycling routes to become a
17 cycling destination, road and mountain bike, obviously.

18
19 Trail running. I know it's a bit of a long-term, not battle, but focus that I have with
20 Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland. If I can put this into perspective: There's 2 million
21 trail runners in France. There's about 11 million trail runners in the U.S. If you put
22 this into another perspective, that's twice more surfers in the U.S., and half of the
23 golfers. And the socioeconomic market of the people engaged in that activity are
24 spot on what we want. Executives spending money, they travel. There is an
25 opportunity where it's just branding in Ireland. Wicklow specifically is a perfect
26 destination for that.

27
28 So there is a bit of a fight -- not a fight, but a focus that I have with Fáilte Ireland to
29 say, look, all we need to do is brand this and Wicklow will be first in there.

30
31 We see golf. We're a world-class destination. Haven't really acted too much on this.
32 One of the main focus we're going to do, in terms of outdoors, is generate as much
33 imagery as possible, so we can sell and showcase what we have in terms of outdoor
34 activities.

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On the back of EcoTrail and the Fáilte Ireland, we have developed a lot of - how do I say - partnership or create a great partnership with the Tourism Ireland's offices, especially in Europe, and the U.S. as well, slowly but surely. And now we do welcome a lot of calls from them to say, look, we will help the Tourism Ireland to organise their press trips. My job really is to focus, to get them to go around the county as much as possible. And so we welcome a lot of journalists as well, and influencers, and that results in a lot of exposure on media abroad. Obviously, online press; we've been on radio in France and Spain, and we've been on TV in France as well. So a lot of exposure we get on the back of that.

The Wicklow Passport. The infrastructure works well. Actually, it's actually working really well. We sold 600 passports last year, and we distributed more than 2,000. We are coming up with a new passport, that looks more like a passport, with a lot more opportunities for more stamps, and we're making the whole Wicklow Passport more flexible, where we are going to invite the members of the trail to have their own stamp, that it would be much easier for them to use and make it more flexible. More stamps to collect.

On the back of this, we are going to work on creating new itineraries and challenges. And we welcome -- we are going to incentivise and push the trail to create their own itineraries and challenges as well.

Digital promotion. Obviously, the website and the social media is where most of our communication happens. Visit Wicklow, the website, is number 1 on a lot of the -- or top ranking on search engines for a lot of keywords for Wicklow.

We did an extensive campaign with the wicklownews.net team from October to December, focusing on Halloween, midterms, with autumn colour walks in Wicklow. A lot on Christmas, with shopping and things to see and do. And obviously, the Wicklow Passport. And the Wicklow Passport turned out to be a great Christmas present. So we're going to push that as well.

Tourism displays. So we did a pilot scheme with River Valley in Redcross, where

1 they had a big wall. We said, well, you know -- and there's always struggling to
2 have enough maps to show where people need to go to discover and -- the things and
3 do -- things you can see and do around the area.

4

5 So we said, look, let's take that wall, and how can we make it relevant and yet
6 flexible enough? So we design -- we put a big map of Wicklow, and then we
7 designed a few posters, A4 posters, that you can snap on those frames. And really, it
8 is an introduction to what people can see and do around the area. And there is a QR
9 code that links back to the website, and, there, all the information is there. And it is
10 flexible. It prevents printing too much, and reduces the distribution costs.

11

12 I want to find ways to push this, and I will engage with the local -- Municipal
13 District to see if there is any opportunity. We started speaking with Greystones to
14 see if there is an opportunity to have a permanent display of where we can change
15 the information regularly in various areas, where there will be traffic and where
16 visitors might be coming.

17

18 Ireland's Ancient East. Obviously, there is a bit of restructuring at their end, with a
19 bit of a change in narrative, but we're there. We have the 5,000 years of history, like
20 no other county in Ireland. There are opportunities that are going to come our way,
21 and we just want to be ready to grab those opportunities.

22

23 One of the quick -- one of the focus we might do is create a short history of
24 Wicklow, with the objective to give a bit of perspective when people come and travel
25 in the country, against the local and national history of Wicklow.

26

27 Yes, please, sorry.

28 Wicklow, naturally, the brand, the food network is working really, really well. But
29 we have a maximising tourism potential, so it is going to be one of the focus that
30 we're going to push or work on for this year. We want to enhance or increase the
31 food experiences, so we can sell the great flavours we have in the county, and
32 develop the October feast festival as a flagship festival, give us an opportunity to
33 shout about the foods and drinks that we have in the county.

34

1 And the last slide is about screen tourism. Again, I don't think there's anything that
2 has been done since Excalibur drive 35 years ago in the county. We are missing an
3 opportunity here. I got a variety of requests to go and see where the Vikings have
4 been shot, and I can't show anything.

5

6 There is an opportunity behind screen tourism. We will work, now there's a
7 screen -- the screen Wicklow team in Clermont where we are now based, working
8 with them, we will develop -- working on development of field trails. The image
9 there is Wednesday, which was the most successful English language series on
10 Netflix, and is going to be shot in Wicklow in the next two months.

11

12 There is great opportunity there. Northern Ireland maximised that against the Game
13 of Thrones. There has to be ways for us to do this. So we are going to work with the
14 team to see if we can maximise the potential behind this.

15 And that is the extent of the short presentation.

16 Thank you very much.

17 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Fred. I am just going to invite
18 Lorraine in.

19 MS GALLAGHER: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thank you to Fred and the team for
20 all the work that they do in tourism. It is only the tip of the iceberg. And we have
21 some wonderful tourism products in County Wicklow. We have the brilliant and the
22 fantastic Avondale Beyond the Trees. We have our own jail here in Wicklow town.
23 Powerscourt. Glendalough; the jewel in the crown, one would say, for County
24 Wicklow. We had a fantastic tourism networking event there last Thursday, in
25 Avondale Beyond the Trees, where we saw providers in the tourism sector come
26 together to network and listen to the supports that we offer. We had presence there
27 from Fáilte Ireland, from the County Wicklow Partnership. The Head of Enterprise,
28 at the LEO gave a presentation and information on supports that are available.

29

30 Fred mentioned the whole area of opportunities within the film sector, film tourism
31 and food tourism. And now the whole craft made in Wicklow brand is coming
32 through, and I think we can work and capture, you know, that area as well.

33

34 The tourism -- or the networking event that we had; we got some key points of

1 information from them. We asked the challenges that we're facing, and of course
2 there was no surprises there in terms of accommodation, in terms of -- but it was
3 very, very positive, all the opportunities. The whole outdoor recreation piece came
4 through. So just to say, I know Fred has only given you a snapshot, but the work that
5 the team are doing is fantastic.

6 So thank you very much. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Lorraine. And before I open it up to
8 the floor, I just want to thank Fred, myself, as well. He has been really pushing this
9 EcoTrail. Councillor Melanie Corrigan participated in the last EcoTrail. I did not
10 participate, but I was there to clap everybody on, including Melanie. But it was just
11 unbelievable, the countries people had travelled to for that event was just
12 phenomenal.

13

14 I also had the opportunity to be at that tourism event. And despite all the challenges
15 in the county, I couldn't believe the enthusiasm by people in this sector; coming up
16 with ideas, really show -- I got to sit at a table with a gentleman from Alive Outside.
17 Talking about Ireland's Fittest Family. How can we showcase that? So not just
18 movies, but actual film -- or TV that's taking place.

19

20 So I think it is a really, really exciting area. So I am going to open up to the floor.
21 So Councillor John Mullen.

22 COUNCILLOR MULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Fred, for your
23 presentation, and for all the work that you and the team do in promoting Wicklow
24 Tourism, and trying to grow the tourism product throughout the county, not just the
25 centre points we all know about, Glendalough, Powerscourt, but particularly the
26 untapped gem that is southwest Wicklow and northwest Wicklow.

27

28 But in particular, I don't think we should shy away from the challenges, and one of
29 the challenges I think that is coming up time and time again is, you know, one part of
30 this Council promotes tourism, wants tourism, needs tourism, and then another part
31 of this Council -- and again, I have to say plainly, the planning department, we have
32 a huge shortage of short-term accommodation in Wicklow. And time and time
33 again, I know local businesses trying to develop short-term accommodation, and they
34 run into the brick wall that's called the planning department of Wicklow County

1 Council.

2

3 And it's just -- I was wondering can you make -- are you allowed to make
4 presentations on that to the Council to try and, you know, show how important this
5 industry is to Wicklow, and how important it is to the future of rural Wicklow, that
6 we have short-term accommodation of a high standard?

7

8 And again -- and I know our planning department have their obligations as well, but
9 there is genuinely on the ground, I have seen it, I was at a launch with
10 Councillor Blake there on Saturday, of our new accommodation in Shillelagh,
11 country pods, and done to an unbelievable standard and an unbelievable investment
12 by the family in it. And yet, we have to have more of it. Particularly in our towns
13 and villages, we have -- the amount of dereliction that could easily be turned around
14 into short-term accommodation. But the regulations and the red tape is just
15 extraordinary.

16

17 The other thing I would like you to try and address as well, in a positive way, is,
18 most of our walking trails in Wicklow are agreed access walking trails, with the
19 generous donation of the lands by private landowners, and we need to grow these
20 trails and maintain these trails. But there's a lot of myths out there that need
21 addressing. And I do think we should be more proactive in addressing landowners;
22 some of the myths out there that might prevent a landowner allowing a walk go
23 through his or her land.

24

25 Because in my experience, over many years working with agreed access walking
26 trails in the Tinahely area, we have had nothing but positivity from the farming
27 community when the walks have actually opened. And a lot of the myths that are out
28 there have dissipated. Now, there are challenges as well.

29

30 But I do think we should be far more proactive in meeting our landowners' concerns,
31 addressing them head on, in order to retain and maintain and grow our walking.
32 Because it is essential to the rural economy of this county that we grown this
33 industry.

34 But thanks very much for your work.

1 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

2 Councillor Edward Timmins?

3 COUNCILLOR TIMMINS: Just briefly, two points, Fred. And first of all, thanks
4 for your presentation and thanks for your work. And it is a vast area, covering
5 tourism in Wicklow, and all the potential things. But I just want to highlight two
6 things, and John has referred to one of them.

7

8 Firstly, the hill forts around the Baltinglass areas. There's 11 hill forts in the -- in the
9 area, ancient hill forts; 2, 3, 4,000 years old. It's by far the highest cluster in the
10 whole country. It's a standout product. And unfortunately, it's barely been tapped.
11 We got some funding for archaeological digs that happened there three or four years
12 ago. Guys from UCC, and they have given us various presentations over the years.
13 But it's still only completely in its infancy, completely untapped.

14

15 Now, a lot of them are on private lands, and access is going to be difficult. But I just
16 think, in years to come, it will develop, it will happen. It's an amazing and unique
17 product, and it's something we need to push and try and source funding for from
18 wherever to develop this.

19

20 The second thing John referred to there, and it is something I brought up here in the
21 past several times, is just the Airbnbs. Airbnbs bring tourists to parts of Wicklow
22 that never get tourists. Little small villages in rural west, northwest, southwest, west
23 Wicklow get tourist from all over the world, and then they -- you know, there's
24 obviously, given the rent pressure zones that all of our district is under, the
25 Council -- and I can't criticise them for this -- have come knocking on the door
26 saying, do you have planning for it?

27

28 People apply for planning, and they go through, really, a very, very difficult process.
29 Like, for example, a current case I am dealing with, the person has been asked to
30 come up with a legal agreement to solidify the fact that it's going to be a short-term
31 let. And they want -- the Council want to register as a burden on the property. And
32 they have got to go now and engage a solicitor and go to that cost to try and come up
33 with a legal agreement that will be satisfied to the county. There is no template from
34 the Council.

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But it's far too -- it's far too rigid. Now, I understand the Council's position. We're in rent pressure zones. They've got to implement national policy. But there is also another side of this, and in our County Development Plan about developing tourism, developing rural tourism, that's another part of the plan that could be looked at.

I just think that is a real challenge, and it is becoming so difficult, that some people have just given up because of the obstacles, and it is a dreadful shame, because it's a -- Airbnbs has worked a treat in the rural areas.

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

Councillor Rory O'Connor?

COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: Thank you very much for your presentation, Fred. Before I get to my two points, I just want to say, I think you're an absolute asset to this county. I have engaged with you quite a lot, and I think you're always very positive to new ideas and very engaging.

But my first point, though, is that, with your job, it's very much high risk in a sense that you could do an idea like the Wicklow Passport, and you print them all out, and you are using taxpayer money, and it absolutely flops, and you then have to be accountable for that. And I find -- you know, I think that makes it very, very difficult to get new ideas through the Council, because obviously there's the risk with taxpayers' money.

But I just wanted to say, as a councillor, I am completely for you taking risks like the Wicklow Passport and, you know, putting Wicklow on the map.

And then my second point is about the film trail which you mentioned. In my own area, Bray West, you know, in Enniskerry, we developed our own film policy because we're getting so many films filmed in our local area. And I think, to develop a film trail, it actually might be difficult, because we are getting so many new films filmed, that, to be able to constantly update that would be very, very tough.

But, yes, I just wanted to say well done on all your work, and it's great to have you

1 here.

2 Thank you

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Fred, are you okay if I take a few
4 more?

5 MR VERDIER: Yes.

6 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stephen Stokes?

7 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Fred, thanks very much for the presentation. We haven't
8 actually met before, but Kathleen Kelleher, former Mayor of Greystones, always
9 sings your praises. So thank you for your very hard work.

10

11 I think it's exciting, you know, great potential there in relation to the QR codes and
12 the information boards, particularly in Greystones. I certainly believe that
13 Greystones Railway Station would probably be really well suited to that, because we
14 get a lot of tourists that come down from Dublin for the day on the train. So, you
15 know, I would be very happy to liaise with you about that as Cathaoirleach.

16

17 And, yes, you briefly touched on the greenways. And maybe this is more a question
18 for Leonora, perhaps, but I would be very interested to see where we're at in relation
19 to the East Coast Greenway. I think it is going to bring -- potentially going to bring a
20 lot of tourism to the area if we can get it up and running.

21

22 And then just again, you know, in relation to the film trail, you know, I suppose to
23 concur with Councillor O'Connor, you know, we're potentially looking at Greystones
24 Media Campus, you know, Ireland's largest film studio, is coming to fruition
25 sometime in the future. So that will add to that further. And there is clearly a lot
26 happening, and I very much take on board what my colleagues from West Wicklow
27 have said about Airbnbs.

28

29 But I certainly believe in the Greystones area, I mean, we are probably the largest
30 town in the country without a hotel, you know. And with the potential of the film
31 studios and the East Coast Greenway, I think that is something for all of us to
32 redouble our efforts on.

33

34 You know, when we have a hotel, you know, and I know Michael Nicholson has

1 made an announcement about this before, that -- at a district meeting. But I mean,
2 there's so much potential for all kinds of different tourism. I remember when we
3 used to have a hotel in Greystones. In fact, I think we had seven hotels at one point
4 in Greystones, many years ago. You know, I remember in the early 2000s, that we
5 hosted the Irish Chess Championships twice. And I think if we can get a hotel up
6 and running in Greystones, there's no reason why we couldn't do that kind of tourism
7 as well. Because I imagine that we're doing all these wonderful activities and plans
8 and things that you are doing, but I imagine accommodation is something that comes
9 up all the time.

10

11 So I would be very happy to continue to work with you on all of that. So thank you.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

13 Councillor Lourda Scott?

14 COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yes. Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Fred. I just want
15 to say it's a really great presentation, and really interesting to see all the different
16 initiatives that's going on. I -- sort of echoing what Councillor Stokes has said, it's
17 just really nice to see sort of a move towards static tourism displays and the QR
18 codes, is something I've been bringing up a lot in Greystones.

19

20 We used to have the wee sort of paper maps of the town, which inevitably end up
21 dropping out of people's bags and being scattered along the side of the streets. So I
22 think we need to move away from that. And it is great to see that reflected here.

23

24 On a kind of a similar note, I -- again, I have a lot of friends of mine have ran the
25 EcoTrail and have nothing but praise for it. But I suppose the word "eco" is in the
26 title, and I was just wondering sort of how many measures -- I mean, running events
27 tend to be notorious for their waste, both in sort of people travelling, as you
28 referenced, from all over the place, and also just in terms of, you know, quite
29 necessary, water and fuel and all that sort of stuff along the course.

30

31 And I think when you sort of dive into the details of it, there are some measures
32 made to make it eco-friendly. But I am just wondering if that really could also be a
33 really good selling point, more upfront, I suppose, on the website; because more and
34 more people participating in these events do want to mind the environment as well,

1 and just sort of to sell that piece maybe a little bit more.

2

3 And sort of on a similar theme, you know, again, we're talking about showcasing
4 Wicklow as the outdoor destination. And again, I think there's plenty of opportunity
5 to have it as the sort of eco and environmentally friendly outdoor destination as well.
6 Not only of being good to mind our, you know, places that we want to bring our
7 tourists to, but also, it is like a selling point. We have our new climate action plan.
8 You know, we have lots of ambitions in this area. And I think we can benefit from
9 that in an economical way as well.

10 So thanks for that

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

12 Fred, I might let you come in there. We've another seven speakers. So hot topic. So
13 I will let you respond to those, if you want, first.

14 MR VERDIER: Thanks for that. Where am I?

15 Councillor Mullen, planning accommodation, yes, it's complicated. You know, like,
16 I am happy to go and meet with them and make a presentation. We have identified
17 this as an issue. We have been fighting for this. And, you know, I get calls from
18 people that want to set up something, but then planning is its own, and they have to
19 tick their own boxes, but I am more than happy to go and talk to them and, you
20 know, make a presentation.

21

22 Landowners. It's actually interesting because the -- I met with the landowners that
23 have the ring fort in Baltinglass, and they were struggling to -- so, happy to meet
24 with them, and there's the outdoors committee, and then the outdoors that
25 would -- that's their job to do this, to link up with them.

26

27 So in partnership with, and showcasing the benefit of having walks and the revenue
28 that it can generate. The example: In Belmont where, you know, on the side of the
29 farm, they have this walk going up the little Sugarloaf, and then they set up a
30 business, the farm, and then a hub. So there are opportunities. And more than happy
31 to meet up with any landowners as well.

32

33 Councillor Timmins, the hill fort. Again, it is the same idea. Baltinglass is one of
34 my biggest -- I am banging my head against it because it is one of the most beautiful

1 hill fort we have, and it is in Wicklow, and you can't access it. And I did put a
2 picture of the hill fort one day on social media, and that is how I got to meet with the
3 landowner, who is complaining back to say, you can't do that. Anyway. It would be
4 great to have the opening up there as well.

5

6 Airbnb, it is the same. Liability of taxpayers' money, Rory -- did I go too fast? No,
7 that's it. Look, we take chances. And again, it is not just me making a decision. It's
8 a lot of people that, you know, we bounce and discuss, and then if we think it is a
9 good idea, you know, and you have to take some chances sometimes.

10

11 Where am I? Film trails. Too many films. We might focus on the big blockbusters
12 first, and then work our way up, and then find locations where we can have plaques
13 and stuff like that, it would be great to have. And you can have a digital trail as well.
14 It doesn't have to be focused on the one film. You can have a location, and that
15 location can be hosting so many different films as well.

16

17 Information point, Councillor Stokes. Yes, I would love to have Greystones. I know
18 exactly where I would love. I would love to have potentially a digital screen would
19 play interesting stuff and then have the thing -- so more than happy to work with you
20 in the Greystones area to develop this.

21

22 Greenways, I don't have the latest information, so I will pass it on to somebody else.

23

24 The Media Campus Greystones. I remember having a meeting on the back of
25 Westport developing their own tourism, and then having a whole infrastructure to
26 make sure that they're friendly. And then the guy, the engineer that developed
27 Westport came to make a presentation in Greystones, and one of the feedback that
28 we had from Greystones was, does Greystones really want it? And it was from the
29 land -- the community, they said, we need it. You know, for us, we need
30 accommodation. And a hotel bringing a marketing campaign, and marketing budget
31 that enhances, and it has a spillover of the whole economy at local level. We would
32 love to have more hotels.

33

34 Eco ethos. So EcoTrail was set up in France, in Paris. Sustainability is the key.

1 And where we introduced the event, it's to make it as impact -- minimal -- less
2 impact as possible. So we have introduced -- we're working about Leave No Trace.
3 We're working with Pure Project to cleaning up the trails. There's no single-use
4 plastic allowed. We have no metals. There's no -- we incentivise -- or we push
5 people to use public transport as much as possible. So there's a variety of ways
6 that...

7
8 I think the first year was interesting, because the first year, the guy that cleans the
9 seafront came back to me and said, it's cleaner than what you had it when you got in.
10 And then the week after -- or the month after, you have the Dublin Marathon, and it's
11 a dump. It really is a dump. And it was so like -- so we are very conscious. And
12 that is why, like, as well, the trail running, there's no impact. It's on sustainable trails
13 as well, and people come with their little bag.

14
15 We also created a -- instead of a tee, you can plant a tree, and it's a partnership with
16 the Wicklow Wolf as well. So we are really conscious about the whole sustainability
17 and tourism.

18
19 There are a few projects of eco sustainable, especially with the overseas, with the
20 ferries, where we can connect with Wexford, into Cork, and have people to get on
21 the train to come to us. Some of those journalists, a lot of them, I try to get them on
22 a sustainable itinerary, so they take the bus. One of the guys that came in, he spent
23 the whole week away, but he took the -- obviously, he flew in from France, but then
24 took the train down to Arklow, took the bus to Shillelagh, and then worked his way
25 all the way back to Bray. And for me, that was a key focus; like, can we make it as
26 sustainable, and then for us to communicate those sustainable itineraries back to
27 Fáilte Ireland Tourism, and I said, look, we are, if you come -- and I know France is
28 really pushing the idea of come with a boat.

29
30 Now, is it really more sustainable than the plane? I'm not sure. But, at the same
31 time, the idea is there, you know, slow down, come and spend a bit more time here.
32 I think that's it.

33 CATHAOIRLEACH: That is great, Fred. Thanks.

34 Councillor Miriam Murphy?

1 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And, Fred, it's great to hear
2 you. I know you miss me badly.

3

4 Fred, just -- I know the work that goes behind the tourism and the board and
5 whatever, but I am just wondering, like, I see some other counties advertising there
6 on RTÉ, and I know it is very, very expensive, but, like, is there any possibility of
7 having an ad on our national television?

8

9 Also, I think it's difficult for Wicklow, again, because of geographical and the lack of
10 hotels as well. But, I mean, our hotels have to be more -- our volume of hotels is
11 what I am saying. And again, as Councillor Mullen has said, some of the issues is
12 with planning as well, which is unfortunate.

13

14 But I know, in other counties, that it is quite a difficulty for our tourism coming in,
15 because a lot of the hotels have international people in it over the last few months,
16 and I think our tourism is going to be very, very, I suppose, negative on that, and it's
17 very hard to promote it.

18

19 And I think it's a difficult time for tourism, nationally. But I think even Wicklow,
20 because of the lack of hotels, it's really unfortunate, because we have a beautiful
21 county, and -- but I really do think you all do great work.

22 So thanks, Fred.

23 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

24 Councillor Peir Leonard?

25 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks, Fred. I would firstly agree with
26 Councillor Mullen about the, you know, sort of rural accommodation and stuff like
27 that. I think there's a lot of potential to explore there and to support people that are
28 trying to get pods and Airbnbs up off the ground.

29

30 I'm from Arklow, and we are really lucky that we actually have some fantastic
31 hotels. The Arklow Bay Hotel, The Woodenbridge Hotel, Brook Lodge &
32 Macreddin, Moneylands Farm. All in kind of around a really -- all of Wicklow is
33 beautiful, but of course I am going to say the area that I come from is the most
34 beautiful, and is connected to the most beautiful things.

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But one area I think that's missing are, you know, sort of are experiences, and I have been involved with the Made in Wicklow Craft Trail, and I think there's a lot of potential there to kind of link, you know, people coming down to do workshops and, you know, sort of tie into the whole creative experience. And not just that. Tie into the whole music scene, that should be thriving, that has kind of died a death after Covid.

And I think, looking at all of these things, and trying to get all little micro events; but having one place that the events and experiences can be seen on a website. You know, that you can go in and see for the whole county what's going on, and when it is going on, and a link to how do you book in to get in to do whatever.

I just wanted to ask as well about the tourism offices. How many are there in Wicklow, and what way do they operate? And are they run under your committee or -- no? And I just wonder, I just think there's a lot of potential for them to transition from being a static, you know, kind of office, where they just have leaflets, to something that maybe could tie in with Wicklow naturally and the Wicklow craft strategy; you know, that we could use these buildings a little bit more, have added value to them.

Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

Councillor Gerry Walsh?

COUNCILLOR WALSH: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to Fred for the presentation.

As a member of Wicklow Tourism, I have witnessed first-hand your work, your great work in promoting Wicklow as an outdoor destination. And, indeed, any time we feature in the Tracks & Trails programme on RTÉ, you know, the Wicklow destinations always stand out. And I have attended the EcoTrail events, and, you know, and saw the sheer enthusiasm and joy around those, and the appreciation of the organisation at that event, and the actual route and the feedback from the route has been so positive.

1 You're right in relation to golf and film. I mean, the massive potential around both
2 the golf and film as a -- you know, Wicklow as a destination there. And, again, your
3 tourism display walls idea there with the QR code attached to the framed posters is
4 something that, yes, certainly is the way forward, and we would like to see that,
5 certainly. I know you're looking at Greystones. That would be fantastic.

6

7 But, look, as previous speakers have said, the accommodation is the key. We're
8 looking at the Glendalough Master Plan. And one of the ideas around that is to keep
9 the -- you know, extend the stay. So where visitors come in to attractions like
10 Powerscourt and Glendalough, and the Honeypot features; the idea is to spread them
11 around to the other areas and keep them. But the accommodation is the issue there,
12 as you know. And Fáilte Ireland carried out a workshop there, a tool -- and provided
13 us with a toolkit there two or three years ago, and that identified the range of
14 accommodation needs and where they lack -- you know, that certain lack in certain
15 areas and that, so...

16

17 Look, I was in Glenmalure there shortly after Christmas, and I went into the
18 Glenmalure Lodge, and you'd have to -- to stay there, you would have to be booked
19 months in advance. So I think the message is, you know, there's massive potential
20 there; build it and they will come. So, again, well done on all your work, Fred.

21 Thanks again.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

23 Councillor Shay Cullen?

24 COUNCILLOR CULLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Firstly, Fred, well done on a
25 great job. You have been soldiering away now for a number of years, and certainly
26 we are seeing the benefits of your work.

27

28 I suppose, in terms of the EcoTrail, it has gone from strength to strength. And I
29 remember our conversation back when this started off, I think it was about 25,000 to
30 get it up and running, and we were wondering was it too much. But I have to say it's
31 came back in spades. So well done on the initiative, and it was something really
32 worthwhile.

33

34 I suppose, as many people know, my passion of trails and improvement of trails

1 across, I suppose, the Wicklow Municipal District is something I really think has
2 benefited Wicklow as a county. And I suppose, we can never underestimate the
3 economic benefit that walking trails have made to this county. And I can only speak
4 first-hand in terms of the Vartry Trails and the effort and the money that we've put
5 into that. It has absolutely benefited the village of Roundwood and Laragh and those
6 particular areas no end. And we can see even a new business opened up recently,
7 Roundwood Stores, and the reviews they're getting; but an awful lot of their
8 customers go to the Vartry Trails first of all, and then go for their coffee and food
9 afterwards. And this is replicated, I think, in a lot of other areas as well, but it is just
10 an example I wanted to give.

11

12 It's got to the stage at this particular point in time that the issue we have in that
13 particular area is parking. Not enough parking. So that will tell you the benefits of
14 what has happened in terms of tourism in the county.

15

16 I would have to also mention, as many other speakers have, the planning issues. And
17 this is not aimed at you, Fred, but I do think a conversation is going to have to be had
18 with our Chief Executive and Director of Planning in terms of what is the criteria to
19 try and improve the planning situation for, you know, short-term, I suppose,
20 accommodation.

21

22 And it's the single biggest issue we're faced with in this county. If we want to
23 progress as a tourism county, we are going to have to sort out our planning issues in
24 terms of developing tourism potential. Just again one example recently, where a
25 person applied for a motor home or -- yes, a motor home sort of park for short-term
26 and was refused point blank in the Laragh area. And, you know, I am going to talk
27 about the Glendalough Master Plan and what we're trying to achieve in Glendalough.

28

29 But this particular individual has been completely put off because of the planning
30 system. It was an outright no. And, I mean, we're going to have to look at this. I am
31 absolutely passionate about making sure that, you know, we solve this issue.

32 Because it can be solved; if we have the will to solve the planning issue in terms of
33 tourism, we can benefit unbelievably in this county.

34

1 One final point, Fred. I don't know whether you are going to be able to answer this
2 or not, but, Ireland's Ancient East, is it a success for Wicklow or is it not? And I ask
3 the question because I do have reservations. Is Wicklow getting enough out of
4 Ireland's Ancient East, or is Wicklow Tourism doing more for Wicklow than
5 Ireland's Ancient East?

6

7 And I think the latter is probably the case, where Wicklow Tourism and all the work
8 you have done has benefited us as a county more than the Ireland's Ancient East. So,
9 I suppose, if we are going to continue, and I suppose we have no choice in terms of
10 the Ireland's Ancient East model, it is how do we benefit better out of what they are
11 offering, or what are they offering in terms of what we have?

12

13 So continued success, Fred. Wish you well. You're doing fantastic work, and long
14 may it continue.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Just three more speakers, Fred.

16 Okay?

17 Councillor Vincent Blake?

18 COUNCILLOR BLAKE: Thanks, Chair, and thanks, Fred. I know you're over time.
19 I won't delay you. But I am not going to repeat all the things about Airbnb and about
20 planning and so forth in rural areas.

21

22 But, look, we occasionally be in towns like Cavan and Monaghan, for instance, up
23 north, and they're towns, inland towns. And Stephen Stokes referred to Greystones,
24 second biggest town in County Wicklow, and no hotel in it. They're building
25 hundreds and hundreds of houses in it. Why don't we talk to the builders and say to
26 them, okay, we need a hotel here, what about building a hotel rather than continuing
27 to build houses?

28

29 And I see Gail Dunne is going to Arklow with his conference at the end of the week
30 here. I'd say Gail would love to be here in Wicklow Town with it. But we lost our
31 one hotel in it as well. So a county town, and no hotel in it of a significant nature.
32 I'd say Gail would love to be here with it this weekend, having it here. But we're
33 building hundreds and hundreds of houses, and we're not asking the builders to
34 provide those essential accommodations for our county, that's called the Garden of

1 Ireland.

2 Thanks.

3 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

4 Councillor John Snell?

5 COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, Fred. I suppose it's
6 really important to have a strategic plan in regards to tourism. And indeed, I know
7 you are working hard there all year round. And it is just to highlight the fact that,
8 you know, you should be pushing an open door when it comes to the Garden County.
9 You know, we're rich in historical sites. You know, our heritage is beyond belief in
10 regards to sites north, east, south and west. And then if you factor in, in regards to
11 new development, like Avondale and the experience at the Treetops. And I know if I
12 start mentioning other sites, I'll be told I'm parochial, because I'm talking about the
13 sites in the east, and other councillors are talking about sites in the south. But the
14 reality is, we're the one county.

15

16 And, you know, five years ago, our biggest issue was that there were too many
17 people coming in to visit sites in the county, but they were only staying for the day,
18 and commuting back out, and they were going to the capital, or they were going to
19 Kilkenny, or they were going to other neighbouring counties. And I'd love to know
20 the figures that's available to hand in regards to how many beds have we lost since
21 the use of hotels, B&Bs, Airbnbs, or the like, over the last five years?

22

23 Because the reality is, now we have our neighbouring counties also suffering with a
24 lack of bed facilities, to such a degree that we have citizens in our county, and in our
25 country, who, it's cheaper, actually, to avail of going to concerts, for example, in
26 other European cities than to book accommodation in Dublin City or County
27 Wicklow, or the like, wherever the concert might be; whether it is in Cork or
28 Tipperary or whatever.

29

30 And I just think that's a worry for us as a nation, for Fred and his team who are
31 working hard there to promote tourism. And I'd like to see figures in regards to
32 international tourists compared to our own national tourists; so people who are
33 coming in for the day experience, and whether it is a long day or not, there is people,
34 and we meet them from the four corners of Ireland, whether it be in Glendalough or

1 wherever. But they find that they have to commute back home, whether it be three
2 hours or four hours, because it is just too expensive.

3

4 So I think you've a lot of work to do around that. I would encourage you to keep
5 working in regards to Screen Wicklow and the amount of work that's going on
6 behind the scenes there in Clermont Campus, and I know your team are working
7 hard, and I see it first-hand. And just to welcome that, and expand on it, as other
8 members have said. Because we have something to sell there, that a lot of counties
9 don't have, in the amount of films that's being made, whether it be commercials or
10 otherwise, within the county, and to get some type of a trail up and running.

11

12 So I think we all know the unfortunate downfall at the moment, the lack of bed
13 facilities, and that's something that needs to happen at a higher level. But if you have
14 figures, I'll be fascinated to hear them. But, as I say, it has moved from five years
15 ago to now, where the issue has slightly changed. We were worrying about them
16 going back to Dublin. Now we're worrying about them not coming in at all. Thanks,
17 Cathaoirleach.

18 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

19 And finally, Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

20 COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Fred, for
21 the presentation.

22

23 I sit on a lot of different committees, but I have to say, sitting on the Board of
24 Wicklow Tourism is one of the most positive committees that I am on, and well done
25 to you, Fred, on that.

26

27 And again, just the networking event last week. I am so glad I went to it, because
28 just meeting so many different people from totally different aspects of tourism in
29 County Wicklow and listening to the opportunities and challenges that they
30 presented. It really was incredible, and I feel I learned an awful lot about it, and I
31 think they got an awful lot back. The feedback was just tremendous on it. So well
32 done. But on that, you know, other members have mentioned about the different
33 challenges.

34

1 Another one I would have to say would be the traffic, parking, accessibility. We're
2 becoming a bit of a victim of our own success, in that our beauty spots are becoming
3 so overpopulated. I know up in Enniskerry, a popular influencer posted about Crone
4 Woods being one of the nicest areas. And since then, I have been getting, every
5 weekend, the guards, the locals on to me about they can't access the road because
6 they're blocking all the roads everywhere. So, look, something really has to be done
7 about that.

8

9 And I know we had the launch of the Glendalough Master Plan, but I really think,
10 like, a park & ride system or something should be implemented to try and, you
11 know, get people from one place to another, where they can leave their cars safely
12 and not cause obstruction.

13

14 And as Councillor Leonard was saying about the Craft Trail. The quality of the
15 videos that were produced on the Craft Trail was just astronomical, and the whole of
16 County Wicklow, and, again, it is something that can really -- I think we're going to
17 be using it for some of our presentations when we go away. And it is just absolutely
18 fantastic, and really does sell County Wicklow. And tourism, it is such a broad
19 spectrum of, you know, what we have to offer.

20 So well done, Fred, and keep up with the good work.

21 Thanks.

22 CATHAOIRLEACH: Fred, I will let you come in very quickly on those, and then I
23 will let the Chief Executive in.

24 MR VERDIER: Miriam, she's gone -- look, in terms of ads, we will look at any
25 opportunities that -- but it has to have a focus. You know, an ad without a focus -- I
26 think we -- one of the key results of the workshop on Thursday is people are keen as
27 well to push Wicklow to the international market. So we might look at those, and
28 maybe have campaigns abroad. Again, there has to be structure behind this.

29

30 Lack of accommodation. You know, this is what we are fighting against. I mean, if
31 I go back to the EcoTrail, you know, I had to send people to Dublin, you know, for
32 overnight, which is crazy.

33

34 The Craft Trail opportunity, and it is back to what Melanie was saying as well. I saw

1 those videos. I wasn't there at the launch. And I think I am discovering something
2 that is fabulous. So there's an opportunity with the Wicklow Passport to create a
3 craft trail, you know, and get people to go around and discover new stuff, and a nice
4 opportunity to communicate around. And the quality of what is done is -- like, I
5 discovered this myself on the back of that one.

6

7 Events. We -- the calendar of events on the website is working well. So any event
8 that is coming up, if you send us the information, we will have it up there for people,
9 and then we do promote those events a bit early. Leading up to the event, we
10 have -- we do a bit of campaigning on social media as well. So anything is -- we will
11 communicate on any event.

12

13 Tourism offices. So there's only really one official from Fáilte Ireland, it's in
14 Wicklow Town. But that thing again is open when it is open, and it is not open when
15 it should be open. The one in Arklow, I think it's staffed by CE schemes. And then
16 there's one in Blessington that is, again, CE scheme as well. But they have
17 developed a bit of a shop there as well, to make it more like a variety of use.

18

19 If you take the example of Dublin, Fáilte Ireland have stopped the big one they had
20 in the church way back then, where Molly Malone is, because we all walk around
21 with the tourist office in our hand, and that's really where it is at. Having the
22 information ready. That's why the information point could do the link between the
23 tourist office and the information on the ground. And then use the -- each facility
24 has its own use. We can get in touch, and then see can we diversify the use within
25 the existing location, the tourist office, and see if we can develop the craft and the
26 food in there.

27

28 Accommodation issue. Again, issue with parking, planning. Ireland's Ancient East,
29 that's a good one. Look, we were never fond -- to be honest, we were never fond of
30 the brand, but it was a difficult one anyway. And so it did what it did to showcase
31 the wave -- the history that is in this area of the country, where the waves of migrants
32 that came in left their marks.

33

34 We have that in Wicklow, better than anywhere else. I mean, we have burial tombs

1 that are 5,000 years old. So we have this. But that is not our unique selling point.
2 Our unique selling point is the outdoors. And we have been banging with Fáilte
3 Ireland to say, look, you need to include this a lot better.

4

5 And they are changing, in the sense that it will have -- I think they realised that, you
6 know, once you visit a castle, you move on and you're gone. When you engage in
7 outdoor activities, then you need somewhere to eat, and if you've got them for food,
8 then you've got them for a bit longer. So it's been our fight with them to say, look,
9 include outdoors, include -- make sure that we get an opportunity to really showcase
10 what is our strength, the outdoors, and much more.

11

12 So we don't want to knock it off, because it is -- it has achieved quite a decent
13 amount of exposure. And it's the local -- the -- it's the channel. We need to go
14 through them in order to reach as well the overseas. So I am trying to influence them
15 to embrace a bit more about what we are -- what Wicklow is about. And they get it.
16 I think they get it. And I'm waiting to see whether they are going to come back with
17 the -- it's not rebranding, but, you know, how are they going to extend the narrative
18 of Ireland's Ancient East.

19

20 Where am I? The builders for accommodation. We did do that, but the builders did
21 look at the numbers and they see what is easy and what is not easy. A hotel needs to
22 be run. And from the study that was done earlier, a few years ago, so you need to
23 have at least a hundred beds to make the hotel viable. And it is such an investment.
24 For us, we would love to have more beds and accommodation, but it's a business
25 decision that the developers take.

26

27 How many beds have we lost? I don't have figures. But there is a general figure that
28 we have lost 20 to 25% of the accommodation supply on the back of the Ukrainian
29 and the refugees, and that's massive; when we were -- we identified that we were
30 lacking in accommodation before.

31

32 Now, there's opportunity in the sense that, again, if you take away from one to give
33 to the other one, then it's always -- we were talking about the Council before, An
34 Óige, you know, that is something we lost, and, yes, you don't want to put those

1 people out on the street either. So there is a humanitarian demand and there's a
2 tourism demand, and how do you manage the two of them? It's a complicated one.

3

4 And what do I have last? Park & ride opportunity, I think, is huge. I think one of the
5 key feedback from the workshop is a lack of transport. Transport was one of the key
6 issues we had. There is this route from Arklow down to -- all the way to Blessington
7 and beyond. How much is it being used? How much is it being advertised? How
8 regular is it? But we should have more opportunities to -- and, hopefully, the
9 Glendalough Master Plan will deliver on that.

10 And I think --

11 CATHAOIRLEACH: I think that's it. Thank you, Fred.

12 MR VERDIER: -- I covered most of it.

13 CATHAOIRLEACH: Emer, I will just let you come in there.

14 MR VERDIER: Thank you very much.

15 MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you so much to Fred and
16 the team, and Lorraine and Susan and all the rest of the team. There's a huge amount
17 of work goes on, I suppose, behind the scenes.

18

19 Just in relation to planning, I suppose, it was a common theme what members raised.
20 I am very happy to sit down with you, if you want to kind of form a group, or
21 whatever, come to me individually and chat through the planning issues around
22 short-term accommodation, glamping pods, parks, you know, whatever it might. I
23 am very happy to have that discussion with you, and just see if we can facilitate good
24 sustainable development, I suppose, in the county that aligns with the development
25 plan.

26

27 I suppose, just, I suppose, Fred has probably only probably tipped on the iceberg of
28 all the different synergies that there are in the county, because tourism is not just a
29 visitor attraction; it's craft, it's music, it's arts, it's culture, it's heritage, it's history,
30 and trying to stitch that together in a way that presents itself that is sustainable and
31 attractive, not just to the day tripper. Because, you know, we are on the doorstep of
32 Dublin, so we're always going to get day trippers, but that we are able to market the
33 county in a way that it deserves to be marketed, that it is a really, really beautiful
34 location to come and visit, and stay. But, to do that, we have to have

1 accommodation. So we're going around in a circle here.

2

3 But it is something I am very, very conscious of. I'm very, very keen to see Wicklow
4 experienced for all that it has, but in a way that is sensitive to its environment. I
5 mean, the Glendalough Master Plan would be one of those, I suppose, really where it
6 is a mix of heritage, visitor attraction, and that balance between the natural
7 environment that Glendalough sits in, and the whole county is in that environment,
8 and that's why the new Fáilte Ireland plan is hugely, hugely important as a
9 destination plan for Wicklow.

10

11 So I am very happy to talk to members, as I said, about the planning issues in
12 particular, because I do -- I heard it very loudly and clearly from everybody there.
13 So happy to do that at a future date.

14 Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

15 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. Thank you. Thank you, members. And thank
16 you very much, Fred.

17

18 The next item, correspondence, I think we have one piece.

19 MS PURCELL: Just to remind the members that the ethics declarations are due by
20 the 28th of February, and the declaration on donations were due back by 31st
21 January. Not saying that any of you haven't submitted them, but, if you haven't,
22 please do it immediately.

23 Thanks very much.

24 CATHAOIRLEACH: That's great. Thank you very much.

25

26 Sorry, the next item of Notice of Motions, we have one notice of motion. So the
27 notice of motion is the name of Councillor Stephen Stokes, proposer, and seconded
28 by Councillor Rory O'Connor.

29 Wicklow County Council supports the AILG Ready for Reform Campaign.

30 Wicklow County Council also calls for more powers and functions to be transferred
31 to local government.

32 Wicklow County Council further resolves to write to the Minister for Housing, Local
33 Government and Heritage about the matter.

34 So Councillor Stephen Stokes?

1 COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach. Myself and
2 Councillor O'Connor have brought this motion today to further highlight the need for
3 reform of local government in Ireland. In late October 2023, the Council of Europe
4 published a report that found Ireland is compliant in only eight out of 20 principles
5 of the European Charter of Local Self Government.

6

7 I would like to acknowledge and thank Councillor Gail Dunne, President of the
8 Association of Irish Local Government, for his work highlighting the challenges
9 found in the report, and, in particular, the Council of Europe expressed concerns in
10 three key areas.

11

12 One: Limited democratic decision-making powers. The investigation revealed that
13 Irish local authorities had limited democratic decision-making powers. It highlighted
14 a power imbalance, leading to a democratic deficit.

15

16 Two: Insufficient financial resources and autonomy for local authorities. The
17 Council of Europe found that Ireland's local authorities face significant financial
18 constraints, limiting their ability to provide essential services and adequately respond
19 to local needs. The lack of financial autonomy was identified as a key obstacle to
20 effective local self-government.

21

22 And three: Cathaoirleach, Ireland having the most centralised system of local
23 government in Europe. The report concluded that Ireland is far from decisions being
24 taken at the closest point to the citizen.

25

26 Now, in terms of delegation of power, since the Council of Europe report was
27 published, I have heard further contributions in this chamber, including today, from
28 public representatives who have expressed concerns about the role of councillors in
29 decision making. At times, we do have impassioned debates, but that is healthy for
30 democracy. And I retain full confidence that, if given the opportunity, local
31 government in Ireland will come to balance decisions on behalf of local residents, if
32 power is further delegated.

33

34 Finally, Cathaoirleach, could I say that the intention of this motion is to work

1 towards positive change. In our own council of Wicklow County Council, it should
2 be noted that there are many dedicated officials and employees who are making an
3 impact in the lives of people across Wicklow. We appreciate their service. But the
4 key point of this motion is to seek to address the documented challenges. As such, I
5 believe it would be timely for us to continue to pursue reform of local government in
6 Ireland.

7 Go raibh maith agat.

8 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

9 Councillor Rory O'Connor?

10 COUNCILLOR O'CONNOR: I won't say much more, because I think Councillor
11 Stokes has covered pretty much all the bases there.

12 But one thing local, we have the local elections coming up very soon, and in many
13 parts of the county, turnout is a huge issue. You know, we have some parts of
14 Ireland getting 20% of people coming out. And I strongly believe there is a huge
15 correlation between the turnout and the perceived amount of powers the councillors
16 have. And I believe, if we do fix the issue around powers for councillors, we will
17 have a huge turnout in elections, because people will see this is their chance to
18 actually get their voice out, and it will make us, as councillors, more accountable for
19 our actions, which is great.

20 But yes, I am happy to second this. Thank you.

21 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor.

22 Councillor Peir Leonard?

23 COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yes, I just want to really commend Councillor Stokes
24 and Councillor O'Connor on this motion. I think it is actually probably one of the
25 most important motions that will have been passed, if it is passed, over the last few
26 years. I have witnessed this first-hand, the lack of power that I have to represent my
27 local voice, and the other way around; that people perceive that I have powers in
28 decision making that don't come from local councillors at all.

29

30 For instance, what happened during the week down in Arklow, people think that I sat
31 somewhere picking and choosing a building to put an IPAS centre in.

32

33 And it is not just that. It is URDF funding. It is having input into important
34 infrastructural, you know, investment in the towns. And I think by balancing out the

1 power -- and it is not a competition. You know, we're all ensuring that our future
2 generations, you know, that they will have democracy and be able to be part of their
3 local decision making. Because if we keep removing it, and keep heading in that
4 direction, none of us know where that is going to end up, you know.

5

6 I think local community, grassroots decision making is where it should be. And I
7 think that's where the beauty happens, and that is where we can have a thriving
8 economy, a thriving, really healthy and, you know, sort of society, and that it will
9 benefit everybody. So I really commend the two councillors for bringing that
10 forward.

11 Thank you.

12 CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Miriam Murphy?

13 COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Sorry, Cathaoirleach. Yes, I totally agree, and it's
14 amazing that, you know, we all sit here and we talk about, thinking are we making
15 changes. But, you know, even in the last year -- or the last five years, since the last
16 election, I think our powers have just diminished. And I often wonder where the
17 next ten years in politics will go, and how our local communities probably won't
18 develop even further, where, you know, the funding is not there, our decision making
19 is not there.

20

21 And I feel that our public have lost interest in politics. And I think our public feel
22 that we are responsible for everything, and everything comes through us. And I feel
23 as well that, again, the local election is coming. And how do we entice people to go
24 forward in election, and how do we entice people to give up their private lives to be
25 open?

26

27 I mean, we have all been very exposed all for the last couple of months with the
28 international situation coming to our doorstep. We have sat and we have looked at
29 this, and we think, you know, God, we feel sorry for people. Now we have been
30 dealing with it, but we have no powers. And the thing of trying to communicate with
31 decision-makers is unreal. But we have to try and make change. We have to try and
32 continue with loving our community and actively being political. But we are very
33 limited. It is like having no legs or arms at times. And sometimes are we being used
34 as a piece of dirt, or a puppet?

1

2 And, you know, it is sad to think that we are in this situation in this modern age, and
3 I think a reform, but it has to be from the top. It is not something from the
4 bottom-up; this has to be from the top-down, and I think we all are a part of that
5 change.

6 Thank you.

7 CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much, Councillor.

8 Do we have any dissent from this motion? (No.)

9 No? Okay. The motion is passed then.

10 Thank you, members.

11 That concludes our meeting. And those who are part of the Protocol Committee, if
12 you could hold back.

13 Thank you.

14

15

(Time noted: 5:26pm.)

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