BUDGET MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN AND VIA TEAMS

ON MONDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 2026 AT 10:00AM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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MEETING COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 23RD NOVEMBER 2026 AT 10:00 AM, AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Welcome, everyone; elected, members, staff, members of the public, press. I am going to first pass to Rachel for etiquette and roll call.

MS GILLESPIE: Good morning. Thank you everyone. I would like to welcome everyone to the meeting this morning. If anyone has any technical difficulties please contact either Teresa or myself. I would like to remind all partaking that they are bound by the code of conduct for councillors and employees. I will now proceed to take the roll call. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Mark Barry? Not present. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne? Not present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Orla Finn?

COUNCILLOR FINN: Present online.

MS GILLESPIE: Present online. Thank you. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald, apologise received. Councillor Patsy Glennon?

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Shane Langrell?

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Present.

MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present online.
MS GILLESPIE: Present online. Thank you. Councillor Pat Mahon?
COUNCILLOR MAHON: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Present online.
MS GILLESPIE: Present online. Thank you. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Present online.
MS GILLESPIE: Present online. Thank you. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Apologies received from Councillor Gerry O'Neill. Councillor Warren O'Toole?
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Anseo.
MS GILLESPIE: Anseo. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Here.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes?
COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Present. Councillor John Ward?
COUNCILLOR WARD: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Ned Whelan?
COUNCILLOR WHELAN: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Are there any votes of sympathy? Councillor O'Brien.
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Thank you. I want to offer my condolences to the

family of Billy Crean. Billy hails from Ashford and was a great community man. He done a lot of work for the community but never looked for any recognition in fairness to him. I know he will be a sad loss to his wife Marie, his sons Francis, Anthony and Declan, his daughters-in-law, Deborah and Fiona, all his grandchildren, and indeed the wider community not just in Ashford but in Rathnew and Wicklow because he served his community well. He done us all proud and I know he will be sadly missed, and I hope he rests in peace. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Finn, did you want to come in? Okay.

COUNCILLOR FINN: No, sorry, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Glennon.

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like a vote of sympathy for Thomas Richardson who is being buried this morning. Thomas was involved political with Mildred Fox out in West Wicklow. He was her man out that side of the county and got some things done through her time in office. He's being buried this morning. His wife only died in January of this year. So deepest sympathy to the family.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Richmond.

COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I just propose a vote of sympathy for the family of Henry Kearns, his son Brian works with the Council, his two other sons and three daughters. He was laid to rest at the weekend. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Mahon.

COUNCILLOR MAHON: Yeah, thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'd just like to be associated with that vote of sympathy from Councillor Glennon for Thomas Richardson from Lackan. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Langrell.

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like to send a vote of sympathy to the family of Denis (Din) Fanning in Roundwood. A very active man in the farming area of Roundwood. He was the first member involved with the dog trials in Roundwood which will be running 80 years next November. I would like to send my sympathies to his son Des, his daughter-in-law, Anne, and grandkids. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Yeah, sorry, is Councillor Dunne online, is he? I'm not

sure if he's online?
MS BYRNE: Not yet.
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Okay. I know he wanted to pass condolences, and I was going to share it, with the family of Mick Doyle who sadly passed away two weeks ago after a short illness. Mick was only 56 years of age. Again, a great Rathnew, a great Wicklow Town man when he moved in here. I know he will be sadly missed by his wife, Karen, and his son, Alfie, and the wider community. A massive funeral here in the town here that I haven't seen in a long time. Just on behalf of Councillor Dunne and myself I would like to offer our sincere condolences to the family. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Finn online.
COUNCILLOR FINN: Hi, I'd like to offer my condolences to Kerry and Niall Callery on the passing of Kerry's mother, Lynda Doyle. Kerry, as you know, is a member of staff there in Wicklow County Council and her husband Niall, both of whom are well-known in the Wicklow Town area and very involved in local businesses and activities. My sincere sympathies to Kerry and Niall.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. And Rachel, any staff?
MS GILLESPIE: James McManus, father of our friend and colleague Tony McManus.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. If everyone can stand, please.

(Moment of silence.)

MS GILLESPIE: May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.
CATHAOIRLEACH: So I am going to pass to Rachel as we have two suspensions of standing orders.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. So we have two suspensions of standing orders. I will deal with this one first. Proposed by Councillor Peter Stapleton and seconded by Councillor Silvester Bourke: "That this Council, in considering the Capital Investment Programme 2027-2029, will develop a scheme to provide for a Municipal District Capital Fund of up to €5,000,000 over the remaining term of the Council, being €1,000,000 per Municipal District, funded from available development contributions, on the following basis:

1. The fund is for medium to large capital projects, with no allocation of less than €100,000;
2. Projects are brought forward as business cases by the Municipal Districts, each approved by a majority of the members of that district;
3. In assessing a business case the Chief Executive shall have regard to the development contributions already committed to projects in the district, the class of infrastructure under the development contribution scheme, council and national policy and local delivery capacity."

And the second one then is proposed by Councillor Joe Behan, seconded by Councillor Peir Leonard: "That this Council rejects the Government's decision to remove the Triple Lock on participation of our Defence Forces in peacekeeping operations abroad and calls on the Government to put the issue to the Irish people in a referendum before taking any further action."

Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, thank you very much. Yes, I formally second Councillor Stapleton's motion there, and I also want to oppose the motion calling for a special debate today on the Triple Lock removal. It is not an issue that I have fully understand yet and I don't understand the pros and cons. I need more time, as I think do other members in the Fine Gael group, to consider the ramifications of what we decide today. So I propose that if that motion is to be discussed that it be deferred until the next meeting of the Council to give us more time to consider it properly.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yeah, thank you, Chair. I was just going to come in on my motion to give a little bit more background on why I have put it before the Council today, and why it is relevant on budget day. I think today is important as always when we think about how we're allocating the resources to the county to best serve our constituents, but I think over the last number of years I have noticed, and it certainly has been a frustration of my own, that our powers in passing a budget only extend to current expenditure. So I think what this seeks to do is have our councillors pay a greater role in the capital expenditure for the county and

specifically playing a role in how that's spent at municipal district level. So that's why that motion is sitting here, and I would hope that it would get support from across the chamber.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Cathaoirleach, if we're going to start debating these proposals for the suspensions well then let's do it now. Normally the procedure is it's proposed and seconded for discussion later. So, you know, Councillor Stapleton has already kind of begun the discussion on his particular motion. As far as I'm concerned, we should wait until the budget meeting is done and then look at the two suspensions. With regard to Councillor Bourke's point, he can make that point when the time comes but I honestly feel it's a bit rich considering that the Government are racing legislation through the Dáil at the moment to abandon the Triple Lock and it may already be done before we have our Council meeting. That is the urgency of having this proposal before us today. So again, I would like the opportunity to discuss this after the budget, Cathaoirleach.

MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, Councillor Behan. So we have dissent in relation to the Triple Lock. So we will take a vote on that now as to whether or not the standing orders will be suspended. Correct? Yes. Okay. So we will proceed to a vote there. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.

MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Mark Barry? Not present. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.

MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Against.

MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Against.

MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Against.

MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.

MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne? Not present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Against.

MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Tom Fortune? Not present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Peir Leonard?
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Pat Mahon?
COUNCILLOR MAHON: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against, was it?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Yeah, that's right.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you. Councillor Ian Neary.
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Against.

MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Stephen Stokes?
COUNCILLOR STOKES: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor John Ward?
COUNCILLOR WARD: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Ned Whelan?
COUNCILLOR WHELAN: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Thank you. That's 15 for, 11 against, and 5 not present. So therefore -- Just bear with me one moment, please. Sorry, there. The resolution is that we need two-thirds. So we needed 20 to pass. So it's not carried. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. So we are going to go into the main budget piece of the meeting. Before I pass over to Brian. What I want to say is I am going to keeping firm to the three minutes today. I won't be extending time. You can come in as many times as you want. I just want to make sure everyone gets the chance to speak. I won't be limiting your amount of turns but I'll just be keeping to the three minute cautions. Okay? Over to Brian.
MR GLEESON: Good morning, members. At the presentation this morning I am going to outline the budgetary process. I'll go through the budget meeting decisions, planned expenditure and income for 2027 and budgetary challenges that we're facing next year. We'll then review the main expenditure and income adjustments to the budget, the commercial rates, ARV, and vacancy relief rate. Then we'll undertake a budget review by service division with the directors of service and finish off hopefully with the adoption of the budget for 2027.

The budget process, the four stages are: The Local Property Tax Variation Decision is the first stage, which took place in October. This was followed by the Municipal District Draft Budgetary Plans which included the General Municipal Allocation. The GMA was adopted by the municipal districts between the prescribed period of 1st October and 13th November. Today is the third stage and the most important stage; the adoption of the statutory budget. And then next year in quarter 1 we have the final stage, which is the Schedule of Municipal District Works, and they are issued to the municipal districts after we have received the roads allocations for the year.

Just to remind you of the Local Property Tax situation. The gross allocation for 2027 is unchanged at 23.5 million. How we came about this was the baseline was increased from 11 -- Sorry, the baseline was unchanged at 13.1. The surplus also stays at 31% of the gross allocation and equates to 7.3 million. 3.1 million of the surplus goes to self-fund housing services, and by the retention of a 6% upward variation we generate an extra 1.4 million. That all comes to a net provision of 21.8 million which is allowed for use as discretionary income in the revenue budget. And this is the same as 2026. As you know, the decision taken at the LPT meeting in October not to increase the variation rate upwards from the 6% meant that no additional money was available to plug our funding gap, as a consequence the discretionary funding for the municipal districts had to be withdrawn from the budget in order to balance it.

The next stage of the budgetary process was the municipal district expenditure. I'm pleased to report that since the draft budgetary plans were issued funding for festivals and economic development has been restored to the draft budget. The GMA that was approved by the municipal districts at the meetings was for €137,000. The revised GMA is now €316,500, and it is split by Arklow, 61,000; Baltinglass, 35,000; Bray, 141,500; Greystones, 35,000; and Wicklow, 44,000. As I say, the total is just over 316,000.

Just to go through the three decisions that we have to make here this morning, and the sequence in which those decisions have to be made. The first one is to agree the Annual Rate of Valuation, the ARV, for our commercial rates next year; the second one is to agree the Rates Abatement Rate on Vacant Premises which currently stands at 20%; and finally, the adoption of the Statutory Budget.

I will now give a brief overview of the budget for 2027. Total expenditure comes to 198 million. That is up 13.6 million on last year. A 7% increase. Housing Division A sees the largest year-on-year increase of 12.1 million, and the Division A for housing actually accounts for 41% of the total expenditure in this year's budget. Other significant variations to look at, you can see nearly 3 million has been removed from the water services division, and that's following the completion of the

water services transition to Uisce Éireann at the end of this year. Also Division H has been reduced by over 1 million. The reason for that decrease is due to the reduction of the discretionary funding of 1.4 million which is offset by a 200,000 increase in the pay and compensation that we received from the department.

I will just outline now our sources of funding. We have four main sources of funding. Grants and subsidies, which is the largest area, accounts for 48% of our income. That has increased by nearly 9 million next year, an increase of 10%. Next is goods and services, which has gone up by over 3 million, or 8%. That increase is as a result of rent and parking income, and it's offset by the loss of funding from Uisce Éireann following the water services transition. Commercial rates, based on the proposed ARV increase we'll see a 4% increase which equates to 1.4 million, and at the bottom you see Local Property Tax is unchanged from last year.

The budget challenges we face. Similar to most years, inflation is 4.1% over the last 12 months. Increased pay and pension costs. As you're aware, the recent National Pay Agreement came in in the last week. Water services transition to Uisce Éireann and the stranded costs that have been unfunded that we have to cover from our resources. We always have increased demand for housing services, continued demand for road improvements. We have our climate action commitments and energy targets that have to be met by 2030. Match funding capital commitments that we continuously have. For example, the Murrough Masterplan was allocated a grant of over 5 million, but we need match funding of approximately 2 million for that particular project. There has been a big increase of shared services charges of 374,000 for next year. That would cover payments we have to make to the likes of MyPay, the LGMA and the Electoral Registration Office, additional ICT requirements associated with increased licence and security costs and our continued rollout of Office 365. But, as you know, as per legislation we must approve a balanced budget so all those factors have to be taken into account and adjusted accordingly.

In relation to our expenditure we categorise it between discretionary and non-discretionary costs. Non-discretionary costs include payroll costs covering salary, wages, pensions. This year we have -- or for 2027 we have 68.4 million of

payroll costs. Contra, that's in and out, our grant-funded items (for example, RAS, DPGs, Homeless Funding, Road Grant, SICAP, LEO, Sports Partnership and our machinery yard) comes to about 97 million. We have other non-discretionary costs, such as light and heat, insurance, loan interest and statutory contributions. So that comes to about 90% of our budget expenditure.

The other 10% of expenditure we relate to discretionary costs, and examples of this would include regional and local roads maintenance, our own resource element; public lighting; housing repairs and maintenance; community grant schemes; environmental, climate and energy initiatives; municipal district works (mainly the non-pay elements in relation to street cleaning, playgrounds, parks and open spaces, burial grounds); arts and festivals; library book purchases; economic and tourism supports; and match funding for capital programmes.

So you can see, members, there is limited scope and flexibility when developing the budget. Also to note, if members were to propose any amendments to the presented budget here today these are the areas where expenditure would have to be taken from.

Just to go through the role of Corporate Policy Group. Under the Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, this provides legislative basis for the budget process. The adoption of the budget is a reserved function of the members of the Local Authority. The Corporate Policy Group should assist with the setting of the overall parameters and the identification of issues and approaches to be taken. The CPG met and discussed and agreed the budget proposals on the 7th September, the 8th October and finally the 2nd November, and I would like to thank the Cathaoirleach and the members of the CPG for their input into this process.

Moving on now to the budget adjustments. I'll go through a number of headings and highlight the main adjustments in comparison to the 2026 budget.

I will start off with pay and pensions first of all. A total of 68.4 million is included in the budget for pay and pension costs. This is 35% of the total expenditure. Sees a

net increase of 2.6 million on the 2026 budget. Why I say net is because we've had to remove 2 million of water services pay costs following the transfer of staff to Uisce Éireann. We also have unfunded water services surplus staff that have remained in the local authority and a number of positions had to be identified for those members. So that is currently unfunded. Pay increases increments come to 2.8 million. The new pay agreement will cost approximately 2.2 million and annual increments at 600,000. Government funded recruitment, fully funded positions, for next year is about half a million, and new pension costs, which include extra gratuities, is 300,000. I suppose some good news in all of that, the National Pay Agreement support we have estimated our income will be up 200,000 on last year from 12.2 million up to 14.1 million. And in the budget we have an amount of 2.1 million for the fire fighters WRC agreement, which is unchanged from this year.

Moving on to housing. The main adjustments in this area, we've increased expenditure in the housing division by 12 million up to 81 million, which is 41% of the overall budget. Extra rental income of 6 million up to 26.8 million. We will see our repairs and upgrade works go up 2 million up to 7.2 million now per annum. Pre-letting increase of 1.7 million, which now stands at 8 million in total. Conditional surveys has been increased by 307,000 and now we have a provision of 850,000. The doors and windows programme that was introduced last year has seen another increase of 250,000 which brings it up to 350,000, and our homeless services have increased by 600,000 up to 4.6 million. Our Housing Adaptation Grants have also increased by a million up to 4.6, and the Croí Cónaithe Grant Scheme has increased by half a million up to 4.5 million. Finally, our payment and availability allocation has increased by 4.2 million up to 29.4 in total. So there's been a significant amount of increased expenditure in Division A.

Moving on to Division B, roads transport and safety. The 2027 allocation is up 700,000 to 33.9. The expenditure is in line with the revised 2026 allocation that we got following the allocations from DTTAS. Regional roads maintenance decreased by 200,000 with more or less a corresponding increase on the local roads maintenance. Just to note as well that we have retained the provision for local roads or line marking provisions of 550,000. That's 110,000 per MD. That was generated by the rates increase last year. So that's in the budget again this year. We also have

retained the Footpath Renewal Scheme of 500,000. That's due to a capital transfer from development levies. And as always, our roads budget won't be fully determined until we get our allocations from the Department and TII in quarter 1 of next year.

Now we will move on to the next slide. The main adjustment, water services. Operational costs are down nearly 3 million. That's obviously due to the transition of water services to Uisce Éireann at the end of this year. Development management, a movement of approximately 300,000 under planning control. That's due to a number of vacancies that were filled in the area this year and now we have a full year cost of those staff in 2027. It also includes a reassignment of staff within the overall planning directorate, and CMC has also increased in that area. The Leader Programme is 200,000 contra; money in, money out. Strategic land development, a 50,000 decrease. Following our meetings with the different directorates we did analyse every line item of expenditure and this is one area that we did reduce based on expected spend for this year and plans for 2027. LEO income has seen an increase of 153,000 and this is offset by expenditure.

Moving on to environment. There has been increases in recycling operations, street cleaning increased, and maintenance and burial grounds of 135,000, 336,000 and 108,000 respectively. All these areas have increased as a result of pay increases, inflation, and basically to match the demand and outturn of 2026. So basically the increases are just maintaining the existing level of service that we're providing under these areas for 2027. Water safety operations has seen an increase of 104,000. In line with EU regulations we have a statutory requirement to carry out additional water quality testing and that is the cost associated with those tests. Recycling charges has seen a decrease of 104,000. This is due to reduced rates on waste in respect of cardboard, paper and other items. And finally, the Fire Service Training Centre has seen an decrease in income of 80,000 as it's being used less for training by other local authorities.

Moving on now to community and recreation. Library services have seen an increase of 357,000, and that is mainly due to pay increases associated with the National Pay Agreement and due to a number of vacancies that were filled in 2026

that will be in place fully for 2027. The Library Book Fund has been retained at 300,000. Parks and open spaces increased by 153,000. This is also associated with pay and inflation costs to match demand. Also based on I suppose demands from the MD staff in relation to this area, in particular three management services. Playground repairs has seen an €80,000 increase, and this is to implement the recommendations of recent inspection reports that were carried out at our playgrounds. So we are obliged to I suppose implement those recommendations and make those repairs. There's an amount of 130,000 for the development of an Active Recreational Strategy. This is a strategic study designed to assess current and future recreation infrastructure needs of the county, and actually it is essential for funding applications going forward. So we don't have a choice. This is crucial. If you want to make applications for sports schemes, anything in relation to recreation, we need to carry out this particular study and produce a report on it.

Moving on finally to miscellaneous adjustments. Discretionary expenditure, as we know, is down 1.4 million. Our insurance premium has seen an increase of just under 200,000. This is due to general inflation and rising healthcare costs and legal expenses. Pay compensation is up 1.9 million up from 12.2 to 14.1 million, and ICT expenditure has increased by 230,000 in relation to licence security costs, Office 365 rollout. Pension increases, total 706,000. Of that 300,000 relates to new pension costs with the balance associated with the recent pay agreement increases. Commercial rates income we see an increase of 1.4 million based on the proposed change of the ARV to 0.233.

So I will now move on to commercial rates, just to give an overview. This table is on page 4 of your budget book. It just gives a picture of the movements in our commercial rates throughout the year. We started off with rates of 34.419 and we've had Valuation Tribunal appeals, global revaluations, new build additions and revisions and delistings, and at the end of it we've got a small buoyancy of just under 37,000. So as we start the year we're at 34.456 million in relation to commercial rates. And that is the reason why - next slide Teresa, thanks -- we are putting forward a proposal here today to increase the ARV from 0.224 to 0.233 which equates to 4.1% of an increase. And that's in line with the consumer price index increase over the last 12 months. The current ARV of 0.224 is well below the

national average of 0.236. And just to note we have only made one previous ARV increase since the town councils were amalgamated back in 2014. That was made last year. However, it should be pointed out that that only impacted 5% of ratepayers due to the Revised Rates Incentive Scheme that was put in place year. Also to note that inflation over that same period since 2014 is 31% and, as I say, we've only increased rates for 5% of the ratepayers by 3.2% over that same period. The increase to 0.233 will generate additional income of 1.4 million, and as mentioned earlier the ring-fenced expenditure of 550,000 which was generated from the increase last year has been retained in the 2027 budget under roads.

And just some more information on the impact of the ARV change. For over 95% of ratepayers, which equates to 3,585 customers with bills less than 25,000, the average annual increase of this change will be approximately €143 a year, which is less than €3 a week. And all these customers, the three and a half thousand customers, qualify under the Council's Rates Incentive Scheme so will be due a 10% reduction. For the remaining 5% or only 117 ratepayers with annual rates bills ranging from 25,000 up to 3.3 million, the average increase is less than 5,000 per annum. But obviously, look, at the top of the scale you can see that's where the big money will be made.

Moving on to the Vacancy Abatement Rate. As per legislation, public consultation and a financial impact report are now required. Public consultation ran from the 6th October to the 20th October and a separate report was issued to the members on this matter. The recommendation is that the rate of abatement for eligible vacant properties is retained at 20% for 2027, and this was agreed with the CPG at its November meeting. Section 9 of the Act also allows us go for targeted policies in respect to vacant commercial premises. During the public consultation we received one submission requesting that not-for-profit enterprise centres are exempt from the general 20% Vacancy Abatement Rate and instead qualify for 100% relief. This was discussed at the CPG and the views were that the proposal not be recommended for implementation in 2027 as it requires further analysis from a legal and financial viewpoint.

So finally just to summarise the budget for 2027. It covers 198 million of expenditure, it sees an increase of 13.6 million or 7% of an increase on last year. It

avoids reductions to frontline services, increases across most services to address the pay increase, cost of inflation and increased demands that we see in our outturn this year. The housing division receives the largest increase of 12 million, and we are proposing to increase our commercial rates ARV by 4.1% to match inflation and bring it up to 0.233. Also the last recommendation is to retain the Vacancy Abatement Rate at 20%.

Thank you for your time, members. We will now take questions in three groupings. The first being housing and roads, and you will see on the screen there's details of the pages in the budget book that those areas relate to. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. So any questions relating to housing first? Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. First of all, I want to thank the finance director and chief executive and the staff for the excellent way this year's budget has been presented to us. It's a lot more accessible in terms of the text. We can see clearly what the aims and objectives are. I think it's a very accessible document and I want to congratulate the finance director on that, and I hope that will be the template for the future because I think it is important that we fully get a clear picture in our own minds about what is happening here for the people of the county. I also want to thank the director for having the hard copy of the budget statement and the figures available for all of the members because yet again -- well, I for one anyway find it difficult to access figures just continually on the screen, particularly when you're comparing backwards and forwards. So again, I want to thank the director for that. It's something that I hope will continue into the future.

Now, just with regard to the housing situation, I suppose the main issue I just want to address, and I have a question on it, is the figure that is going to be added to our income next year as a result of the rent increases. And as I calculate it, it looks like around €6 million extra is coming into the coffers of the Council next year because of the rent increases that have been imposed by the executive. And it also equates to half of the increase in the entire budget for the year. So the tenants, many of whom are stressed and concerned, are actually being billed for 50% of the extra expenditure in this county. That is a massive proportion. And I just want to say extremely stressful again for people who are having to deal with it.

Now, my question in particular is that I am constantly getting people contacting me because they're not getting responses from the Council when they have queries about their rents, and when they do have a disagreement about their -- Sorry, am I being switched off here?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I didn't touch it. If you could just -- and then put yourself in again I will let you back in. Was it the time? Okay. Okay. I'm guessing it was the time, but I'll let you back in.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: As I say, I just want clarity as to how many people are still waiting for an explanation of their new rent, and also how we're going to assist them as councillors if they have a query that they don't agree with how the Council is calculating their rent in the first place. I would like to see far more opportunities for us as public representatives to engage with the officials with regard to that matter, and I want to ask the chief executive if she has any plans in that regard. While the clinics that started last week were welcome what I have been told let's say by people who are working it's fairly difficult for them to manage to get to an in-person clinic during a working day. They're just not able to take time off in that situation. And for people in more remote parts of the county, specifically Carnew for instance, who don't have their own transport, trying to get to Blessington to query their rent is impossible, particularly elderly people. I think we need to do a lot more to meet people's concerns, to address their concerns. I just want to note from the chief executive how are we as councillors supposed to respond when people come to us with all of these requests for help? Because coming up to Christmas, and I will finish on this, chief executive, last when we were talking about possibly implementing the new scheme a year ago you said publicly that you would not start putting extra charges on people coming up to Christmas. This is exactly what has happened a year later, and I think it is grossly unfair the way it has happened. Grossly unfair. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Leonard online.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. I want to concur with Councillor Behan on everything he said there. I think people are struggling and I think they should have discretion to be able to deal with their individual circumstances going forward. It is really important.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Councillor Leonard, you're really low there.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Hello?
CATHAOIRLEACH: You're really low. It's hard to hear you.
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Oh, really.
CATHAOIRLEACH: That's much better.
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: I want to ask a question about the homeless services, and what will that entail. Could we have more details around that? I do think the area needs a slot, so I welcome that increase, but I just want to make sure that parts of the county that are particularly struggling with -- you know, in Arklow we have a lack of housing stock, social housing stock and rentals. I know there's a crisis around the whole country, but in particular Arklow has been really struggling for the last year, by a lot of people selling up. So I just want to ask the question, what does that consist of and will that reach the outer areas of the county as the homeless services seem to be very poor? Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Leonard. Does anyone else want to come in on the area of housing before I pass to the directors? Councillor Stokes.
COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Firstly, I'd like to thank the director for the presentation and also just to highlight in relation to housing, you know it has been a successful year because I believe we were the third best in the country in terms of social housing delivery. So I think that that should be acknowledged as part of this. Also to say that, you know, I find that the housing department staff are absolutely generally fantastic, you know, especially housing allocations. If I write to them I get a very quick response, usually within 24 hours. So I would like to thank them for that. But I would echo Councillor Behan's concerns about the rent review. I mean I have written on behalf of several residents to the rent review team and I haven't had a single response. Now, in fairness I haven't got many queries, you know, that I've sent in but I haven't had a single response. Now, some residents have heard back and some haven't, and you know one thing is, one case I was dealing with where they were actually quite a vulnerable case and I was trying to book a clinic on their behalf. So just to highlight that, that there are still concerns with the rent review. That's not to say that -- I have great admiration for the housing staff, again they're doing tremendous work and delivery has been fantastic in the last year, but I do share Councillor Behan's concerns. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Alvey.

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I also just echo Councillor Behan and Councillor Stokes. I've had a number of tenants who weren't even able to get an appointment at the one of the drop-in clinics. I think there is a little bit of confusion around that term as well because I would have assumed a drop-in clinic is a drop-in where you could just walk in and that is what I was telling people to do not realising people had to book an appointment for that. So I think there was a few concerns around that so it would be great if that could be addressed for those people. Specifically just in around the budget. It's good to see the increase in housing maintenance budget. I just wanted to hear a little bit more detail about, you know, what difference that will make. I know commentary of an extra 250,000 for the windows and doors replacement scheme. Will we see a strong acceleration of that next year? There's a lot of really old estates badly in need of it. De La Salle Court in Wicklow Town comes to mind. I get a lot of reps about very old windows and doors, and I wondering could we ask that an update be provided in the chief executive report each month in the housing division about which estates are going to be targeted so we can pass that on to tenants from concerned estates such as those. And also, I just want to say it is great to see the increase in the housing adaptation scheme as well. It's very welcome, especially as it was so oversubscribed this year. That's all my points on housing for now. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, director, for producing a very comprehensive budget. Just on the housing issue there that has been raised by Councillor Alvey and Councillor Behan I find that Arklow in, for example, the drop-in clinic was -- or the consultation clinic, whatever we're calling it, it was oversubscribed, and there's probably a demand for more of that service. So if it could be extended until it satisfies the need it'll be appreciated. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to Brian for all the work he put into this budget. A difficult budget this year by all measure and means. But just in housing, under the new rent review we're bringing in an additional 6 million; isn't that correct? Is all of that 6 million going into refurbishment and maintenance of our housing stock? Thanks.

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

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to Brian and the

team for the budget. I would like to concur with what a lot of the other speakers have said, including Councillor Joe Behan, but one thing I do disagree with is that there still isn't enough information provided within the budget. I think further transparency with regards to geographical locations and everything else need to be highlighted. Just giving us broad figures and for us to surmise where all this is going I don't think that's acceptable. But I'd like to thank him for clarifying some of the questions that were sent to him last week, and I do understand that 5.3 million is going to be coming from the Rent Differential Scheme. Like Councillor Kennedy, I would like to ensure that these monies are going to be directly allocated for rent for housing and that they won't be going anywhere else as was kind of noted. We still haven't got breakdown of how many tenants are going to be impacted with a 50% increase, a 75% and a 100% increase. I think that's an important thing that has been asked on a number of occasions with none of it being provided to us. And I think that kind of aligns with the tenant impact assessments, were these done in the first place. I'd like to make sure that any of the rents money that is going to be taken in that goes into house and nowhere else. Can we confirm that? Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, look it, first and foremost I want to welcome the increase being allocated for the maintenance of our local authority housing stock. It's a significant increase and as has been mentioned by other members in the chambers obviously I would assume that 100% of that money is coming from the increase in the rent. Can I just ask, it might appear very small money but in regards to the housing estate management it's a significant decrease from 140,000 down to 88,000, and I was just wondering why such a decrease in regards to we all know the importance of estate management within our housing stock. So I just want clarification around that, and the impact that such a decrease would have. I also want to welcome the increase in the Housing Adaptation Grant but I would query in regards to the service supports cost they've doubled or almost doubled for an extra million euros. I just want some sort of clarity around that. Why the significant increase in service support costs. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yeah, thanks. And thanks to Brian and the team for the budget and the engagement before the meeting today. Again I just want to concur with what the others were saying around the rent review and just clarification that the

increase in monies coming from the rents will go towards repairs. But specifically I'd like to know when we will see a break-down of how that money will be allocated per district. I suppose I'm assuming, it has been said to us before that the increased money coming from the rents will be diverted to housing repairs in our own stock but I would very much like to see a break-down as to how that will be spent in advance of it being spent. So perhaps that's suitable for the beginning of the year, because it is very important that that is equally shared across the districts. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Ward.

COUNCILLOR WARD: Yeah, thank you. I would just like to agree with a lot of the councillors here regarding the rent review, and can we have more drop-in centres. The one in Bray was only on for a couple of days. Obviously with Bray being a bigger town we have a lot of people getting in touch with us and asking us we can't get through, there's no correspondence received back from the Council itself, and we are just wondering can we have more of the open rent review cases in Bray. Thanks very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Sorry, I had forgotten to ask a question. What I meant to ask was: Given that the rent review is kicking in there now and many people will be looking at their finances to see would it be cheaper for them to actually buy out the house, pay mortgage than pay rent, have we factored anything in there for say a number of tenant purchases, or a jump in tenant purchases in the year ahead or over the next couple of years? There's bound to be a fair number of people who will be able to buy out their houses, and what impact would that have on the budget? Would you want to be allocating a million extra or so for that?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Alvey.

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Sorry to come in again but just to follow on from Councillor Bourke's point. Could we actually get an information note passed out to all 32 councillors about how the Tenant Purchase Scheme works and all the various different levels and everything that's associated with it. Because as the dust settles and speaking to more and more tenants they are now considering that's a better option for them and it is probably a better thing for the county as a whole that people who can afford their own home can free up some stock. So if we could get some information on that that would be very helpful. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just in regards to the Windows and Doors Scheme, it was quite modest in regards to 350,000 was mentioned in Brian's presentation. I would like to see the continuation of last year when the Tenant Purchase Scheme was being rolled out that there was commitment given that monies that would be taken in by this local authority would be ring-fenced for to put into the Windows and Doors Scheme within our housing stock, and I'd like to see that maintained and I'm just looking for reassurance. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Anyone else before I pass over to Brian? Okay. Thank you. Sorry, Councillor O'Toole.
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Sorry about that, Cathaoirleach. Just in relation to -- I can ask the question about Division B, yeah? Yeah. Just in relation to the trainings and stuff, what kind of dynamic are you looking at in rail infrastructure? Is that on that? No? Sorry, sorry.
MS O'GORMAN: Just to clarify. We don't provide rail infrastructure. It's Irish Rail. Yeah, no problem.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Glennon.
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Just a minor point really, and perhaps an oversight on my part, but the drop-in clinics, I thought people could drop in without an appointment. And I would hope that if that happens that the Council will give them whatever information they have and perhaps come back to them. That's certainly the view I had also, that they were drop-in clinics that people with issues around their rent could call in on the day without an appointment during the appointed time for each municipal district. So I would hope that the Council will come up with some way of dealing with those people humanely. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Cronin.
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Yeah, just I wasn't sure if we can come in on Division B yet?
MS O'GORMAN: I think there's so much on housing we'll deal with the housing and come back.
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: That's fine.
MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you members. And your comments about the clinics are noted. We will certainly look at doing more and looking at a drop-in where people can come without an appointment, just have a

three-hour bloc or whatever it is, you know, with staff. We will certainly look as well at out-of-hours clinics for those in areas where it is needed, for those working that can't get to clinics in the nine to five. That obviously puts more pressure on staff and overtime and all of that but we will certainly look at that. I think also we may run a clinic or two for the Elected Members, if you want to come in directly with reps on behalf of people and have those dealt with on a one-to-one basis with our staff and housing, I'm certainly happy to do that. I think that's important because I know you're getting an awful lot of queries and it might be quicker and easier for you to deal with them directly and feed them back to the tenants in question. Certainly on the Tenant Purchase Scheme we can get an information note out to all members so that you can circulate it to your constituents.

Councillor Behan's point about the rent review and the implementation. Look, when we were going through this last year, when we started off last year, we anticipated it'd be a lot quicker process than it was. It was far more complex than we anticipated and look an awful lot longer than we thought. The original effective date was October and we pushed that out after the feedback from the members here, and that's why we're in November. Unfortunately it is what it is at this stage. This scheme is implemented. But we had intended to have it earlier and we had intended to implement it from October. Brian might come in on the financial issues and if there is anything else, and Michael might come in on housing directly. Thank you.

MR GLEESON: Okay. Thanks, chief executive. I'll just maybe group a few answers. I think a lot of the questions I will be passing on to Michael in relation to it, but just in relation to the finances, just the question was asked about the rental income and that it's being spent in housing. Yeah, 100% of the rental income, not just the extra 6 million but the total rental income that is taken in for Wicklow County Council is retained within the housing budget. We have a total expenditure budget of 80.9 million and the housing income between rental income and Government grants is only 77.8 million. So not only do we retain the housing and rental income within Division A we also supplement that division with 3 million of our own resources that would be generated from other sources such as Local Property Tax. In relation to specifically the 6 million, what we would consider and the Department considers maintenance of houses, AO1 to AO4, there's about 5 million will go into that and then the balance will go in to support homeless services,

DPGs, the creation of a social worker post in West Wicklow as well. So that's a general synopsis of that.

Councillor Snell, I think you had a question on there was a reduction in housing estate management. That was actually a reallocation of categorisation. It actually hasn't been reduced, it's just been moved to a different area within the housing divisions. Following discussions we had with the housing staff it was more appropriate to be somewhere else. So there's no actual reduction in that particular area.

In relation to the break-down by districts, the Schedule of Municipal District Works is issued quarter 1 next year which shows the break-down of not only the housing expenditure but all expenditure across all expenditure programmes by municipal districts. But given the circumstances here and questions being asked I'm sure we can look at something in January when we have all the account allocations done. I suppose just to note that this is a county budget rather than an individual district budget but we will look at providing that information as best we can. In most cases the money in housing where it is split up by municipal district it is for specific direct repairs and maintenance costs and pre-letting, and the allocations are made in respect of repairs and maintenance. It's based on the number of social houses in a particular district. And also with repairs and maintenance, the allocation is based on the number of vacant premises within that municipal district as well. So that's I suppose the criteria for the allocations.

I think in relation to questions on the rent review and the homeless services and the delivery of repairs with the new money I might hand over to Director Nicholson. Oh, services forecast, that's basically to do - sorry, Councillor Snell - with the increase in the CMC, the central management charges. So it just happened to be a big increase depending on the number of staff involved in that. It's just the way it is spread out. It's based on, you will see in the budget book it gives a description of how the CMC is allocated out and the cost drivers that are used to spread it out across all the expenditure. Thank you.

MR NICHOLSON: Just to deal with some of the more specific questions that haven't been dealt with. In spite of the fact that we weren't able to have rent clinics

until the 17th November when the work-to-rule was lifted we have been dealing with all the queries coming in either through members, phones, emails, people dropping in in person. So nobody has been turned away. I only have a certain number of staff working on rents, so it is taking us a while to get through them. The good news is that with the lifting of the work-to-rule overtime is now back in play, so I have all my staff on overtime last week and this week and they're flying through those queries as we speak. I checked with them on Friday and most of the queries that had been outstanding have been dealt with and any of the ones that have not been dealt with will be dealt with this week.

On the rent clinics, the first clinic was Tuesday, 17th in Bray, ten tenants turned up; the second clinic in Bray, five tenants turned up; and the third clinic, five tenants turned up. Just to give you some indication of the kind of reaction we are getting. We do ask people to book in advance because I have to make sure I have staff ready and I've only got a certain number of staff. And in fairness to my housing staff they've all agreed to do shifts across all districts, and we have clinics in the Bray offices, Greystones offices, Baltinglass offices, Arklow offices and here in County Buildings. We have about 15 clinics lined up. So in fairness to the staff some are after hours and some are during the working day. Again we have the after-hours ones to allow for people who can't come during the day, and that's going to make a big difference.

Homeless services increases. We spend over 4 million every year on homeless services, and that's primarily people who provide homeless services for us. Paying providers, paying approved housing bodies. And that is increasing ever year as you can imagine. You don't have to book an appointment per se. We would like to people to do it. We have turned nobody away. If somebody turns up with at a clinic with no appointment of course the query will be dealt with. No one is turned away. But we would ask people, so we can organise it properly, if they would book it in. Some of the clinics are fully booked, and for those that are fully booked we will do more clinics. We've no problem doing clinics and we will put on more clinics if required. But on the basis of what has came in so far I don't think we need any more because they haven't been very well attended. In fact, one day we had more staff there than we had tenants.

With regards to the Tenant Purchase Team, we always get an increase in applications for tenant purchases when we do a rent review. We sell about 12 houses every year, we have sold 25 this year already and we've a lot more going through. I suspect we could be up around 50 next year. It's called the Incremental Purchase Scheme. It is no longer called the Tenant Purchase Team. And we have had a huge number of enquiries. Certainly anybody whose rent is above a certain figure are better off applying to buy their house. You have to be in the house ten years. There are certain houses we don't sell because we are not allowed sell: We can't sell Part 5; we can't sell houses specifically provided for age or disability; we can't sell houses we bought off a developer. And you have to be ten years. And anybody with ten years gets very generous discounts. It could be 40%, 50% to 60% discount, depending on income. So very, very, very generous. I would encourage anybody whose rent has gone high based on their income to apply for tenant purchase and we will do their best to facilitate them. They have to go and get finance, and that often can be the problem because unless they have been proving that they have paid a high rent for a certain number of years and able to make repayments they may find it difficult to get a loan to buy their house. That often can be the problem. I will certainly send all the details of the Incremental Purchase Scheme to all the members. We have a sheet that we send out to tenants and it explains everything about the Incremental Purchase Scheme, so I will send that out that sheet to the members as well.

Brian has already clarified that the full 6 million rent increase has all been allocated across the housing programme for this year.

With regard to the Tenant Purchase Scheme, one advantage of us selling houses is the income from that, we get to keep our internal capital receipts. So when we're doing our normal maintenance it comes from the budget, when we're doing our planned maintenance, such as windows and doors and roofs, and the more significant work, that generally that comes from internal capital receipts and doesn't affect the budget as such. For example, the window and door programme in Farrankelly didn't come from the budget, it came from the internal capital receipts. We are doing conditional surveys across all the MDs to find out what estates need significant improvement, and we will have the money next year because of the Tenant Purchase

Scheme, and also some properties we are going to sell hopefully next year, we should have a lot money to spend on the older stock that need a lot of repairs. We have identified a number of estates in the county that need a lot of work. And this is planned work. It is not maintenance. It is windows, doors, roofs, et cetera. We also give very generous grounds, as you know, from the Department for insulation and retrofitting. We've done very well on those. So I think next year there's going to be a huge level of activity in terms of the older stock in bringing them up to scratch which we said we would do with the rent review. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. We'll take any questions relating to roads now. Councillor Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks very much. It's actually not in relation to roads but it is Division B. It's in relation to public lighting. I have serious a concern about the lack of efficiency in repairing our public lighting. When I was looking through the DeadSure app there at the weekend we have a number of faults out since -- one the 28/11/2025, 4/3/25, 16/10/25, 10/11/25. I have been consistently raising this now over the past number of months. I have contacted the Council with regard to public lighting. Unfortunately I have threads of emails but unfortunately we're not getting any repairs done. I was at the arrival of the Santa truck last night in Dunlavin and there was great excitement because the Santa light actually lit up the street with all the lights. Pleased God next week with the turning on of the lights, the Christmas lights will brighten up the street. Because at the moment we have so many lights out that the street is in complete darkness. I have a concern that we're paying contractors huge money but yet lighting doesn't seem to be repaired. I have been told that a number of the lights are due to -- the faults are due to ESB connections. I contacted ESB. They told me that I need to raise it with the Council. So I'm really at a loss of where I need to go with this now. Obviously it does come up under Division B. And we are playing huge money to get our lights repaired and maintain our lights but I do have a concern as to where that money is going because we are certainly not seeing any improvement in my area in West Wicklow. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Any more questions for Division B?

MR GLEESON: I'll pass that on to Joe.

MR LANE: We are aware of the Dunlavin and we will have a report at our next meeting regarding the issues brought up at the Council meeting. In a lot of cases if they are simple solutions where we can, we have a public lights inspector now and

we deal with them. The difficulty is sometimes it's more complicated and we are dependent on the ESB. Again Dunlavin and some of the smaller villages we are trying to engage in some form of report next week. We are aware of it and we are looking on DeadSure and all that but in our case we are depending on other stakeholders. So it's not quite as simple as just fixing the lights.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I just want to reassure the director it's not just in Dunlavin there's a problem. There's a problem in Bray as well. Two years ago a lot of work went into fixing, you know, what was a huge percentage of lights and there was somebody, an engineer actually put in direct control of that operation, Harry Row I think if I'm not mistaken, and he did an absolutely excellent job. We need that kind of attention again to public lighting this winter. So I would support Councillor Cronin in her comments. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Yeah, thanks very much, Joe. Just in relation to the ESB. I did contact them and they said: "We will carry out work on receipt of reports of lighting failure with the appropriate references and certs, et cetera, from the Council's public lighting. The Council has direct access to our public lighting liaison team. It follows that they are the appropriate channels to raise your query." So I went back to the Council's public lighting team with that and I'm still waiting. And the problem is it reflects very badly on us as councillors as well. I can't physically get up there myself and change light bulbs, but I am constantly getting calls and queries about this. And the same last night. It's very unfair, I'm not even getting a response, I keep getting we'll look into that. There's no timeline. We received an email last night comparing funding with other local authorities but other local authorities are doing things differently and they seem to be able to get their lights fixed. So if we're going to do comparisons with one section we should do them with all sections. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Could I just ask a question in relation to the Bus Stop Enhancement Programme? In terms of funding for that, how does it work? Do we pay for works and then recoup the money under the Bus Stop Enhancement Programme or is that just the funding is provided first and then we take out what we need for it? I do appreciate that this year with the Bus Stop

Enhancement Programme there's been a significant improvement, I think Councillor Behan touched on it, I think one of the engineers was actually moved off the Bus Stop Enhancement Programme to help fix the lights, but we have seen a massive improvement this year and I would be interested to know if we're expecting to, you know, spend all of the allocation for the Bus Stop Enhancement Programme by the end of the year or certainly allocate it. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

MR LANE: Again, sorry, just on the public lights, and again going to both councillors and anybody else. As I said last month, if there are any lights, the ones there I'm quite aware of, but there's no problem with others sending in an email to make sure we're aware of them with the ESB. Again I'll check up on the liaison regarding the Dunlavin ones. We had a meeting the Thursday before the last Council meeting and we had -- I just want to see to see how that relationship is working now.

As regards the Bus Stop Enhancement Programme, there was reports given the last day. We still haven't costed out all the programmes but it is not money, it is just a matter of, as you're aware, a rolling programme and getting the works done. So it isn't restricted to money at the moment. As with all allocations with the Department we spend first and then we allocate towards the end of the year. With any scheme that has started and hasn't been completed by the end of the year we still get a carry on the following year. The money isn't restricted.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Now we're going to move on to Divisions C, D and E. Any questions in these divisions?

MS O'GORMAN: That's water services, development management and environmental services.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Ward.

COUNCILLOR WARD: Yeah, thank you. Is the fire services in this one? Yeah. Just regarding the shortfall of the 80,000 in Bray Fire Services, could you explain why the shortfall? And is it anything to do with the facility not being up to service? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yeah, Cathaoirleach, just a couple of queries. One in relation to water services and so on. So from what I can gather now there's nobody from Wicklow County Council involved in dealing with issues regarding water

supply quality, wastewater from now. If that is correct I just want to highlight the fact that recently somebody, a resident, had a particular issue and somebody arrived saying they were representing Irish Water but they didn't have any ID. Now, they were from the Council/Irish Water. But I'm just wondering if there's a practice of having ID available that if somebody is calling to a resident that they have proper identification. It is just a point, it may not be relevant anymore but I just said to the resident that I would raise it so that's what I am doing.

The other thing I want to raise is under the programme to do with environment specifically and air pollution specifically. Councillors in Bray I'm sure are aware, may well be aware of the fact there's an ongoing major issue of air pollution in Deepdales estate in Southern Cross. There's a major industrial plant there called Alert Packaging. Residents -- in recent times 60 complaints have gone to EPA about this and about the monitoring of what is happening in this particular location. I want to clarify, do we give money to the EPA or how does the system work? Because I would have thought that a complaint comes in to Wicklow first and it's dealt with by Wicklow and then in this particular case it seems to have been referred on to the EPA, but no action is being taken with regard to this major industrial problem which is affecting -- or industrial unit which is affecting local residents. Perhaps somebody can clarify what is our role in relation to suspected air pollution in the county and can we do anything to address it.

The other point is: It came to my notice there recently, and again I'd be interested to know if we know anything about this as a body, that there was a possible national crisis developing last summer, just before the summer, where two of the national incinerators were both out of action at the same time, and there was a build-up of material in a loft locations around the county. And I just wonder are we aware of that. We are supposed to have some kind of a supervisory role with regard to waste management companies and waste management licences and so on. Can the chief executive say if she is aware of what happened during the summer with regard to the incinerators, and in particular the one in Poolbeg which was out of action for a number of months? And it actually resulted in the EPA having to give an additional licence to Bord na Mona to put additional refuse into landfills in the midlands because of this crisis. I'd be interested to know if anybody up there knows anything

about this because there seems to have been a veil of secrecy over this but it could have major national implications. As we're on that topic and we are supposed to be managing the licences of these outfits perhaps you might throw light on it, chief executive. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Anyone else? Councillor Alvey.

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I've one question in relation to development management. The chief executive will remember at the start of the year I raised my concerns around the great increase in the number of estates that need to be taken into charge and all of the issues around the large number of historical estates that are yet to be taken in charge, and just to see if we could have more resources allocated to speed that up and to unfortunately take enforcement action where it is needed in certain cases around Wicklow Town and indeed in Newtown. I just wanted to see is that reflected anywhere here in the budget. I'm looking at some of the enforcement costs and I see that the expected outlay has gone down by 100,000. Perhaps I'm not seeing it and perhaps it is reflected somewhere else in that budget.

Just in relation to environmental services, I just want to welcome as much as anything the increase of 336,000 for our street cleaning. I think this is really important, something that local businesses in our main streets are raising all of the time, and as outlined by the chief executive it is one of the things that will get cut if we can't agree on some of the decisions needed today. I want to welcome that and highlight it. I know the Tidy Towns do a lot of work in that area but we can't always be relying on volunteers. I want to mention that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Leonard online.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. I just want to ask about the environmental services in particular around the recycling centres. I think when they were closed during the strike action people, you know, sort of were contacting me. It goes to show how important they are, and continuing the services. I want to ask a question about, are there any plans to expand recycling services into other areas such as small furniture? I think there's a lot of potential going forward to locate some of our men's sheds and repair cafes on some of the sites. The recycling centre in Arklow is on quite a big footprint of land and I think there is potential to have additional services there. I want to ask going forward are there any plans that do that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I'll pass over to the directors.
MS O'GORMAN: Just very briefly, members. Councillor Behan, specifically in relation to the incinerators. I heard about it in the press probably the same way you did. We got no formal notification about Poolbeg. You are right, we do have a right in licensing of waster operators and Sarah might be able to give you a bit more detail on that process and the air pollution piece.

And just Councillor Leonard, from a health and safety point of view it wouldn't be appropriate to co-locate other activities at the recycling centres. And again, Sarah might just come in on any plans to expand what types of materials we take in those centres. And we will come back to Brian and then to Sarah and Jackie as appropriate. Thank you.
MR GLEESON: Thank you, Chief Executive. Just in relation to the first point by Councillor Ward, in relation to 80,000, it's an income reduction as opposed to a shortfall. There's an income reduction due to the reduced activity at the centre. But it also means that there's reduced expenditure as well. So one offsets the other, so it is not an actual shortfall. I will ask Jackie to come in in a minute in relation to the centre itself.

Just in relation to Councillor Behan's point about the water services, just to say it's from the 1st January 2027. So that example, it could very well have been a Wicklow County Council person working on behalf of Uisce Éireann as part of the SLA because we're still in transition and people are still in the process of moving over but it is from the 1st January that we are definitively moved across the responsibility for all waste and wastewater services.

In relation to development management enforcement costs, that reduction, Councillor Alvey, is just to do with a reassignment of staff within the overall planning division rather than a reduction in services. Street cleaning, in relation to the increase, just to be aware that as outlined in my presentation that mainly relates to pay increases and inflation costs. So it doesn't necessarily mean that there will be an additional impact in relation to the actual service itself.

So I think I'll just get Jackie maybe to go in first of all on the training centre and then

Sarah if she wants to come after that.
MS O'GORMAN: Just before Jackie does, sorry, in relation to ID. All Council staff are issued with ID, Councillor Behan, and they should have it on their person, and we will raise that with Uisce Éireann as well. I'll happily contact them and say if you are sending contractors out they should have ID as well as standard practice. I would urge anybody if anybody is calling to your door do ask for ID. There's an awful lot of dodgy people out there.
MS CARROLL: Thank you, chief executive. Just to clarify, as Brian said it is contra items. So it is money in, money out. There has been reduced activity in the training centre over the last number of years as we had to close it. There's a significant deterioration and damage, and it was closed on health and safety grounds. But I have just received a report we commissioned. A consultant has done an extensive survey done of the building to see the current status and where we go from here. I received that last week and I am currently reviewing it with the chief fire officer. I will report on that as soon as we made a determination on the next steps. Thank you.
MS McCULLOUGH: Thank you. Councillor Behan, the EPA is totally separate to Wicklow County Council. Alert packaging is an EPA-licensed facility. We have no role in that facility. The National Waste Management Planning Office is managed by Dublin City Council and they continuously monitor the waste infrastructure. We licence the small- to mid-scale waste facilities, and the EPA licences the large-scale facilities, and there's thresholds in place to determine when it moves into the large-scale facilities.

Councillor Leonard, we have no plans at the moment to I suppose extend our services for recycling into I suppose furniture. It wouldn't be something that we would be looking at at the moment.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Bourke.
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: I forgot to ask there as well, do we actually make a profit on the recycling services or is it costing the Council money? And if it was to be extended would it cost more? That is one question I have. The second question was in relation to legal charges. A number of years ago we would have had a number of high profile legal cases pending against us and we probably were paying out hundreds of thousands as year in legal fees. What is the situation at the moment

in regard to our allocation for the legal fees?

MS O'GORMAN: Just very briefly on the recycling centres. They certainly cost us more than we take in in terms of income. I suppose part of it is about encouraging people to recycle. So at the moment we don't have the capacity to expand into other areas just because of the cost of providing a new facility. But they do cost us more than what we take in in income.

In terms of legal costs, there are significant challenges out there across the board. We've ongoing legal costs in relation to historical landfill, the monitoring of that case by the High Court. We have various cases where we're named as joint parties in planning matters. We're joined with the minister. And again, these all end up in the High Court, they're significant across the board. We also have a number of cases that go through the WRC. They're not necessarily on work related matters but on dignity and equality. Those matters go before the WRC and attract costs as well. So there are quite a significant array of costs they come in and they come in through the central management costs and are apportioned the different services directors depending on what they're attributable to. But they are quite significant. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. We're going to move on to the last three divisions. Sorry, Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, just two very quick questions for Brian, please. In regards to unfinished housing estates we've allocated €1,000 for the next 12 months and also in regards to derelict sites we haven't put any money against derelict sites and both are issues, certainly within this municipal district area. I assume it's covered in regards to the costs, it's just not reflective in -- like, the services would still be looked after by this local authority. In regards to unfinished housing estates, it's a reduction from 10,000 to 1,000. I know that can be quite time consuming in regards to the staff here and the follow-up and trying to deal with unfinished housing estates. You can ask yourself why are they unfinished in a time when there's a housing crisis but unfortunately some of them are historical. And in regards to derelict sites we've experienced ourselves here in regards to derelict sites particularly in Wicklow Town, and I know again it's time consuming in regards to the effort from the staff here. But it's only just to point out I think the figure is not reflective of the work that goes into it. Would that be fair to say?

MR GLEESON: Yeah, Councillor Snell, just in relation to unfinished housing

estates. As I was saying earlier, we did go through all the line items this year and looked at where money has been spent and money isn't being spent and there wasn't any money being spent under that heading over the last number of years. So given the circumstances we're in we it cut back. We kept it open. We just had a nominal amount of a thousand to be there. I think historically that was there following the crash, you know, and there was major works to be done and obviously that wouldn't be construction works to finish off a housing estate. It'd just be whatever I suppose maybe consultancy or reviews that would have to take place before you'd have to make a case to the department for additional money. But as I said the fact that there hasn't been any activity under that for the last number of years we've reduced it. If that changed obviously we'd have to increase it in future years.

In relation to the derelict site income tax that's in the capital account. So what would be shown here in the revenue account. And there is a new derelict tax scheme that's being brought in.

Can someone turn their mic off, please?

MS O'GORMAN: Can you please turn off your mic?

MR GLEESON: I don't know does Helena want to come in on the derelict site?

MS DENNEHY: Yeah. Again to clarify, unfinished housing estates and derelict sites, they are carried out by the same staff throughout enforcement. Also, derelict sites would be covered under planning control. So our team is kind of split across a number of different areas. The fact there's no single line with a budget on it doesn't mean the work isn't being done in the background. But it is mainly one team across a number of different areas.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. So we're going to take the last three divisions. So that's Division F, recreation and amenity; Division G, agriculture, education, health and wellbeing; and then Division H, any miscellaneous services. So any questions in relation to those, please. Councillor Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach, I just have a couple of questions under the recreational amenity heading. I just see under FO3 there the outdoor leisure operations, the Cliff Walk Greystones is mentioned as one of the recipients of monies here and I was just wondering if that is still the case given that as we all know the Cliff Walk is closed, or if that money is being put into some of

the research pieces going on with the consultants. If I can get clarity on that please.

The other just comment I had was in terms of the funding that we provide support to the Mermaid Arts Centre, and I think it has been quite some time since we've had a presentation from them and I would welcome if we heard from The Mermaid in the chamber here quite soon just as I would be interested in how that allocation is spent across the county.

And the final thing is then there's an annual contribution given to the Charlesland Sports Facility in Greystones. For anyone who doesn't know this is an incredibly important facility within our community. It's something that is very much used. We have sports clubs, alethics clubs, absolutely bursting at the seams in the Greystones district. And straight up, the manager of the facility is very amenable and very easy to deal with, however I do have an issue with the lack of oversight as elected reps we have on the facility. Even though we rubber-stamp an undetermined sum of money being given across to them every year through the budget there's no councillors sitting on the board of Charlesland Sports Park. The reason I am raising it here is because I have been contacted multiple times over many years with issues from our communities, clubs and users of difficulty accessing the facilities, and it's coming from a place where people want to use it more but it's very, very difficult to get a path into the decision-makers of the management to try and address these issues. I have sent in emails over the last number of years, as have my colleagues in Greystones. In July all of the Greystones councillors wrote to the board of directors of the Charlesland Sport Park asking to see the financial statements and asking for a proper path of communication that we could bring these concerns from our constituents to them and try and work together to get a resolution. We haven't had a response since July. So as we're being asked to approve the budget here, including monies going to this facility, I would ask that this is addressed and that we have some more transparency and some more communication with all of the Greystones councillors so we can make that facility work harder and better for our constituents. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Alvey.

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and I think I'm right in the assertion that the discretionary funding falls under this category of miscellaneous

services, if I remember rightly, so just a point I wanted to raise on that. It's good to see the festival funding and economic development funding back in our discretionary funding for the MDs. And thanks to yourself, Cathaoirleach, for a lot of work done behind the scenes on that. In our MD that helps fund really important community events like the St Patrick's Day parades, the Regatta, Christmas lights, it helps fund our Tidy Towns, but overall I have to say I'm still disappointed with the dramatic cuts in this municipal district fund. I know the central council might consider this discretionary or uncommitted funding but the reality is it funds the same community events every year. Things like the Wicklow Pride Parade is funded out of our allocation in the Wicklow Municipal District, and basic infrastructure, like murals and new bins. There is a risk quite a lot of that is going to be halted next year because of the lack of discretionary funding, so I would like to seek additional assurance from the director of finances if savings can be made elsewhere in the year or if extra funding can be obtained from the Central Government that some of this discretionary budget would be restored to the MDs.

Another point I would like to raise, I am not sure exactly where it sits but I will stick it in here to miscellaneous, something that I raised last year is around the status of getting residents associations included in the IPB insurance scheme. Also something that came up recently in relation to that just at a meeting with myself Councillor Richmond and Councillor O'Brien were at was just that apparently that this insurance scheme only covers public liability and doesn't cover professional indemnity for the various committee members that are involved in the different groups, so I just wanted to raise a query around that. Also just in relation to residents associations, people step forward as volunteers to maintain and improve their estates and the reality is the Council would have a much, much higher build for maintenance on those public lands which are taken in charge so I feel the least we can do to acknowledge the work that they do is to ensure that they're insured like we do for our Tidy Towns. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor O'Toole.

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to echo Councillor Scott's concerns regarding the likes of the Mermaid Arts Centre and Shoreline also. I think we need full transparency in some of these things. I welcome the announcement of the 130,000 investment for doing the audit in outdoor spaces. I

think we need a full geographical break-down, including parks, recreational facilities, library facilities, sports, arts and culture programmes. It brings me on to the Mermaid Arts Centre again. The information that was provided yesterday, I am thankful for that but it led to other questions and I suppose if we're looking at what we're getting for that. In Fingal there's an outreach service that reaches 20,000 school children, in Wexford there's an outreach programme that reaches over 5,000 kids, and that's just to name two of them. Most recently the YARN Festival, if we just take that example, there was 23 events held by the Mermaid Arts Centre, six of them were outside of Bray, four in Wicklow, one in Laragh, and one in Glenmalure. It's great all these places had these, I was lucky enough to attend two of them, they were great events, but none for Arklow the third biggest town and none for West Wicklow, I think that needs to be changed. It needs to be looked at. That's it. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Leonard online.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. Yes, I'd just like to comment as well on Division F and just in relation to the arts, and I suppose I am trying to find a pathway forward for the future years to distribute the money, or look for money. I don't want to take any money away from The Mermaid. Like we need every arts venue and we need to grow them and we need more in our district. But just going forward, looking for core funding for arts centres, you know I would welcome a discussion around that and how we can have that next year maybe as part of the thing. I just want to ask a question around the community centre that has been -- the funding that was got for Arklow to purchase a community centre. I believe the building has been purchased, and is there a provision in this budget for a restoration or renovation of a building if a building has been purchased and also the running costs of, and if a building has been purchased what is that ring-fenced for and what is the proposed use for it? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Glennon.

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just in respect discretionary funding, I think it is very disappointing that's gone, and I respectfully suggest that the little bit of departure from what was said at the Corporate Policy Group when the Local Property Tax was being discussed. And while I accept that it was hoped to get an increase in it I voiced this caution to the director of finance when he visited the municipal districts with his proposed budget. It is possible that

you won't even get the 6% above the base rate next year. I think that needs to be looked at. I don't think it should be abolished. I think it provides very important stuff at a local level for all the municipal districts. So I am just echoing that caution again and I would like to hear what the director has to say on it. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: It thank you. Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just in relation to the ARTS services, would it be possible to get a geographical break-down of arts grants that have been allocated throughout the last year as well at some stage, please? It's just that some parts of the county complain to me that they don't see much art investment from the county council, so I would like to see a geographic break-down if at all possible.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Is that everyone before I pass to the directors? Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks very much. Just on the Division H, miscellaneous. I'm assuming the reduction from the 1.4 million to 75,000 is the reduction of the discretionary. And again, I share the concerns of other councillors in regards to the taking away of the discretionary in the budget of almost 200 million. It's strange that some of the projects that were earmarked for the future by individual councillors and collective municipal districts, the money will have to be found somewhere else or not done at all. And I find that quite strange to be honest.

Just in regards to the miscellaneous and maybe I'm missing it, but I don't see anywhere in regards to the fees in regards to the law section. If they're there if it could be pointed out to me and what it costs. Just in relation to any outstanding court cases ongoing do we have some sort of a break-down? It's certainly about 14 years since we had an itemised break-down of the law section and the funding that is being spent in our law section. I certainly don't see anything here unless I'm missing it. Also in regards to outstanding development levies, what sort of figure is outstanding on development levies for the county of Wicklow? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Langrell.

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, Cathaoirleach, I'd just like to echo Danny Alvey's concerns there on discretionary funding. Like myself and my other five colleagues every year and even before my time, the

villages and towns in our district really depend on funding to go towards their Christmas lights. Like the lights were turned on in Roundwood Friday, Newtownmountkennedy there on Saturday and two massive occasions for them two towns and it is essential that if we've to dig deep for the next number of years to be able to fund these villages. Like, you've Glenealy, Rathnew, Annamoe, Ashford, Moneystown, Newtownmountkennedy, Roundwood, really, really depending on this. These towns and communities, like it's getting more expensive every year to get these lights out. The lights have to be replaced every year and they're digging deep into their own pockets and going around asking businesses around their communities for funding to go towards this and it's just essential. So I would really ask that this funding over the next number of years is not affected as it is absolutely essential to these towns and villages. And yeah, that's it. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Anyone else? Thank you.

MR GLEESON: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. In relation to Shoreline, we do provide an annual provision of 100,000 towards the running costs of that. I suppose just to note the background in relation to that. Shoreline Greystones, there's two gyms in Bray and Greystones, Shoreline, they're set up as CLG, we don't pay any money towards the running cost of them. They operate themselves. In relation to Charlesland, the outdoor leisure facility, we requested Shoreline Greystones a number of years ago to take over the running of that, however it is a loss-making exercise and we committed to, as part of the SLA, provide a subvention of 100,000 because it is a very essential service in relation to that. I suppose this is the budget meeting. I'm not on the board of Shoreline. I do know that the manager of Greystones Shoreline did meet with the Greystones members earlier this year and I understand it was a very positive meeting and he has subsequently accommodated a number of groups based on requests made by the Greystones members over the last few months. I would just I suppose remind the members that there are fiduciary duties associated with being directors of CLGs. Regardless of whether someone is a staff member of Wicklow County Council, given those fiduciary duties their priority is first and foremost to that particular CLG.

In relation to Councillor Alvey, I actually had a meeting with IPB last week and they are looking at that Residents Association Development Scheme. It's being teased out in relation to the feasibility of that.

In relation to I suppose discretionary funding, I would make the point -- and I accept it's a very valuable pot of money, I would make the point that there is 3 million of unspent discretionary funds at the moment across all of the five municipal districts. So I think there is an opportunity now for districts to actually I suppose catch up and implement some of the projects. I know there's some districts also haven't fully allocated the allocations they have so there's still I suppose scope for future projects in relation to that.

In relation to, I just make the point, I know Councillor O'Toole made the point about Shoreline, about transparency. The Shoreline accounts, which include Charlesland, they are fully audited and they're available for anyone to look at. So there is transparency in relation to that.

The arts centre, there wouldn't be any capital provision, Councillor Leonard, in relation to that. If there was any refurbishment costs associated with that or the community centre it would come from the capital account. Any running costs, I suppose you'd be looking at probably the budget in 2028 would be the first time you'd have running costs associated with that all going well with any development that would take place.

Councillor Bourke, I think, yeah, a break-down of arts grants by location shouldn't be a problem. We can get Sarah to send that out.

Councillor Snell, in relation to external law fees, that's actually spread across all the different job codes in the budget but the figure is 470,000 is what is spent on external law fees. And also the cost of running the law department is 940,000. Obviously that's mainly staff and payroll.

I think that's all the questions. Oh, sorry, development levies. You said outstanding development levies. Did you mean what still has to be paid?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah.

MR GLEESON: In our debtors there's about 14 million outstanding at the moment. That would be common, you know, across the board. Obviously there's always time delays with as to how certain developments are moved on. Thank you.

MS O'GORMAN: Just in relation to, I know Councillor Leonard asked about was there any group assigned to the new facility in Arklow, not as yet. We probably will go through an expression of interest process as we have done for other facilities and like other facilities a CLG or something similar would be set up to run and look after the building as their own. If it is a multitude of groups we'd welcome that as well. We're a little bit down the line on that but we will certainly talk to the MD about that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Oh, yeah, thanks. So we had asked, as I said just going back to my question which I don't believe was fully answered although thanks for the information, Brian, and the reason I'm raising it is I'm not throwing any aspersions over the running of Charlesland Sports Park, but it is a question about transparency, and that is why I am raising it here. Because we are rubber-stamping money, which is fine. I have no issue supporting a very valued community but it is just we don't have oversight of, say, financials. I would contrast that to, you know, The Mermaid does have a board where there's representatives from different districts on that board. They have input. Just going back there, we did ask as a group of councillors back in July for Charlesland Sports Park most recent annual statements at the annual returns. You're saying, Brian, they are available. I wonder if they could be sent on to us and that perhaps then if we have any queries we can go back to the board or whatever again. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor O'Toole.

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Brian, for the answers, but I don't think the Mermaid Arts Centre was answered in depth. I suppose the books for last year I can't seem to locate them but there is books from the previous year and there might be one payment for an individual of in excess of €50,000. I don't know what that was in relation to. But I suppose what I am trying to hint at is this comes from the information that was provided yesterday. If you want to look at all the different arts centres that was provided each one of them has significant outreach delivering into the counties. So that's what I am just trying to ascertain. Thanks.

MS O'GORMAN: I think in terms of The Mermaid we can certainly invite them to come and present to the Council as was suggested. We do have representatives from the Council on the board of The Mermaid and I think that's the point that you're making, Councillor Scott. We had started a review of how all of our boards are

made up and who sits on what, because we have a lot of staff on various entities around the county, and we can certainly look at it in the broader sense and just see where we stand with different -- and any of the ones that have councillors on them come before ye every year for the members to be appointed. On The Mermaid we do have councillors sitting on them. We will certainly consider that across the board.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just in regards to the figure of 14 million, and I accept that a large proportion of that is perhaps ongoing development, my question is more around the historical outstanding bill of development levies and what proportion of the 14 million could be put down as historical, i.e. over a number of years. In years gone by there wasn't a huge outstanding debt of development levies. Granted it was before your time as head of finance here, and it would have been at a time when income I suppose unrest out there in the building industry. I'm just trying to get my head around in regards to this 14 million and realistically is all the 14 million going to be recouped by this local authority or is there some of that historically money that's struggled to bring in for one reason or another and would it end up then being a legal case? Just a proportion of that. I know it's quite general what I'm asking you and I'm not looking for the specifics, believe me. I am just looking for a ball point figure, please.

MR GLEESON: Yeah, councillor, I suppose we could look at getting you -- I suppose that's the capital account is the development levies, so I don't have that information with me here, but we can do an age profile of that outstanding debt. We do actually make provision for bad debt. You know, we have a bad debt policy that was brought in a couple of years ago on the request of a local government auditor in relation to all our main income streams and we do have a bad debt policy and we apply a certain percentage of that outstanding debt, whereby realistically there will be a proportion that obviously won't be collectable. I can send you on a copy of that policy as well with an age profile of that outstanding 14 million.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Brian.

MR GLEESON: No problem.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Anyone else with any questions? Councillor Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Brian, again for answering all those questions. I'm just wondering in our capital account do we have that funding invested anywhere? Do we collect interest rates on that funding? And I

have a follow-on question then that maybe is not suitable for this meeting but I'll ask it anyway. I am just looking at the whole budget process and I think we're going to be back in the very same place next year again trying to raise money I would think. Just under our assets, and I'm looking at the whole housing shortage at the moment and the valuation of assets and stuff, we're sitting on a very valuable asset out here in our machinery yard and we're also close to the train station, and I'm just wondering is that something we would be looking at going forward, whether it would be developing additional parking there, whether it would be one- or two-storey car parking, apartment or office space or anything, or looking at a PPP on that site there, is it something that we may be looking at going forward into the future in relation to raising money? But if that question isn't suitable for today's meeting I understand that as well.

MS O'GORMAN: Very quickly, in terms of our finances and money on account we do invest our money. We have two different -- we have a couple of different facilities open to us, through the Housing Finance Agency, the NTMA as well. It just depends on how long we put money on deposit for to manage our cash flow. But we do invest and that interest goes back into the revenue account and is used to part-fund a lot of our services.

In relation to the machinery yard and this whole site here, every year I have a meeting with the LDA and they try take the site off me because it is a strategic site in the centre of the town. I have told the LDA if they want to build me new facilities, fine, but we're not going to vacate County Buildings. It is something certainly we could look at in the future. The re-prioritisation and the reuse of some of our more strategic sites around the county and the machinery yard would be one of those sites, it is quite valuable as you say and something we could consider in the future thank you.

MR GLEESON: Just a follow-up on that as well. In relation to our investment income, we have in the revenue budget 628,000 included. That's actually down 200,000 on the 2026 budget because we've spent a lot more for development levies. Obviously there was a big project in Greystones, Chapel Road, and that was fully funded from development levies. There was no external grants provided for that. So obviously it's reduced the amount of money that we will have on deposit as the chief executive said with the HFA and also Danske Bank. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Any more questions before we move on? Okay. We're ready for the votes.

MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. The first item -- as you're aware, there are three items to be approved today in order to finalise the budget. So we'll take the first item, which is to increase the annual rate of valuation for 2027 set at 0.233. So we need a proposer and a seconder.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, thank you very much. Cathaoirleach, this is my 28th consecutive estimates meeting and it's probably one of the most difficult. There have been worse. There's been times where we've spent till the early hours of the morning trying to come to agreements here, but in recent times this is one of the most difficult, and it's something that we have taken very seriously in Fine Gael. We met the Tánaiste and Finance Minister last week to highlight how difficult it has been for the management of Wicklow County Council to form a balanced budget to everyone's satisfaction. We've been urging him to give more flexibility to county councils to make it a little bit easier to balance books. He did mention that he is getting it in the neck from councils all over the country, so it is not unique to County Wicklow. So we are pressing to have a fairer way of doing our business in arriving at figures and expenditure and income for the future. So it will be reviewed we hope. But having said that, I have always supported the estimates and never voted against it. It's always been the right thing to do. I wouldn't do it, I wouldn't vote against the estimates because I have always felt it is the right thing to do to allow the management to carry out the functions of Wicklow County Council and provide the services for the people of the county we're elected to represent to make sure that the job is done and it is done well. So it's with a heavy heart that I'm going to propose this increase in the commercial rate to balance the books. If we had have gone -- It could have been a lot worse. If we had gone with the 0% LPT as some councillors were proposing this would even probably be a higher figure that would have to be proposed or some of us would have to look for cuts to some of the lovely programmes that we cherish and that we have expounded about for the last hour and a half. And that's the seriousness of the decisions that we have to make here today and how we behave. So I am going to finish with a formal proposal and I just want to put a caveat on it to the management, to the chief executive and the finance director don't take it for granted that you're going to get this -- that you can pluck this

tree next year. The commercial ratepayers won't be happy. They're not going to get anything extra for this. Even though most of them are only paying a small bit extra, it's less than €3 a week, but it is the principle of it. I feel that we should have perhaps quarterly or half-yearly reviews. We're going to have to tighten up on financial management. That's not to criticise Brian for the way he's been doing the job up until now but seeing as there are difficulties in balancing the books we're going to have to be more efficient and we're going to have much tighter control on costs here if we're not going to have this problem here next year. So having said that, I just want to say I formally propose the 4.1% increase in the commercial rate.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I would like to second Councillor Bourke's proposal. You know, making sure that we have a balanced budget is vital and for me it is very important that we protect our frontline services but I would agree that we really do need to see decisive investment in local government, not just here in Wicklow but across the country. I would call for an increase to the funding to local government. I know that the AILG, you know, has been very active on this in fairness, but we really do need to ensure that we can deliver the services at the closest level to the citizen. I would certainly support calling for the Government to allocate more funding going forward but I will be happy to support Councillor Bourke on this. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, members. So I will just read, the full vote now will be: "Subject to section 6 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters 2019 Act, as amended, and in accordance with --" Oh, sorry.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Leonard, online.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Sorry, I just want to come in on this because I think it is very important. I understand the challenges that Wicklow County Council has to balance the books and of course we want to retain the services but we also need to acknowledge the strain on our town centres and retail especially, you know. A lot of small retailers, using my own town for example on the Main Street, they're struggling with various different challenges, you know not enough parking. They're competing against convenience stores, bigger stores, shopping centres where people can roll up and drop in to purchase stuff. They really are struggling. There's very little footfall on Arklow Main Street. We've also got a lot of vacancies on the Main Street. So the vacant rates, they're not as much as the rates so again we're back to

punishing the people who are doing their best and investing in their own properties, even some of them who are renting properties to run their cafes and stuff like that, they are painting them up, they're doing them up, you know. So I understand the challenges but I do want the situation, the challenges for retail especially I suppose to be acknowledged, and I would like to see prioritised in any funding town villages the investment back into those buildings, and for all the businesses doing their best and what might seem like little money can be the difference between a business opening or closing their doors. So I just want that to be acknowledged and considered as part of this.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor O'Toole.

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to just add this: I want to acknowledge the work gone into preparing the budget, I appreciate the difficulties the executive have and the financial pressures on local authorities, but I think we need to acknowledge something more fundamental here. Local authorities are not being adequately funded or supported by central government. It is heartening to hear Councillor Bourke voicing his concerns internally with his party. In my view what we are being presented with effectively is a semi-austerity budget where increasing financial pressure is being passed down to local authorities, and ultimately households, businesses and communities. I'd call on the Government parties and Government TDs representing the county to support local authority. And as Councillor Stokes has said this isn't just a Wicklow thing, it's nationwide thing so I think central government have a role to play, a further role to play. Thank you.

MS GILLESPIE: Okay, thank you, members. So item 1: "To increase the annual rate of valuation for 2027 set at 0.233 subject to section 6 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended, and in accordance with the proposed budget Wicklow County Council has determined the annual rate valuation applicable in the calculation of the amount of the rate under section 4 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended, to be 0.233 for 2027." Proposed by Councillor Bourke. I will now take a vote. If you're in favour please vote 'for', if you are against vote 'against'. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.

MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Mark Barry?

COUNCILLOR BARRY: For.

MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne? Not present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?
COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Tom Fortune? Not present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peir Leonard?
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Pat Mahon?
COUNCILLOR MAHON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Not present. Councillor Warren

O'Toole?
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Stephen Stokes?
COUNCILLOR STOKES: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Ward?
COUNCILLOR WARD: Against.
MS PURCELL: Against. Councillor Ned Whelan?
COUNCILLOR WHELAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. That's 19 for, 8 against, and 4 not present. The motion is passed.

So moving on to the second item: To make a scheme for the abatement of rates due. "That Wicklow County Council makes a scheme for the abatement of rates due to it by liable persons or classes of liable persons in respect of vacant properties in accordance with the provisions of section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019. Such a scheme will provide for 20% abatement of rates on vacant premises as provided for in section 9(1) of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act of 2019 for the financial year ending 31st December 2027." Can I have a proposer and seconder, please?
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Doyle.
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yes, I would like to propose that we keep it at the current rate of 20%. I think that this does provide some relief to the landlords of empty commercial premises while also incentivising either the development or the selling on of premises that have been left empty or derelict for

too long. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Murphy online.
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: Yeah, I'd like to second that also. I think it's important to have that included but also acknowledge the vacant premises.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, Councillor. I will now take the vote. Councillor Danny Alvey?
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Mark Barry?
COUNCILLOR BARRY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Joe Behan?
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne? Not present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?
COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Tom Fortune? Not present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peir Leonard?
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Pat Mahon?

COUNCILLOR MAHON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Miriam Murphy?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Stephen Stokes?
COUNCILLOR STOKES: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Ward?
COUNCILLOR WARD: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Ned Whelan?
COUNCILLOR WHELAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS GILLESPIE: That's 27 for and 4 not present. The vote is carried. And moving on to the third item: To adopt the Annual Budget for 2027 as presented without amendment. "To consider the Chief Executive's Draft Budget of Wicklow County Council for the year ending 31st December 2027 and subject to the provisions of section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, pass a resolution adopting the Draft Budget for 2027 without amendment." Is there a proposer for

that?
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Alvey.
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I want to start by thanking the director of finance, Brian, and all the staff on the finance team for the huge amount of work that has gone into this and I particularly want to thank them for the amount of work gone in in advance of this, the workshops, meetings, answering the calls, emails, queries. I think that has helped councillors considerably. Unfortunately it seems there's no alternatives or amendments to the budget we've been presented here today by any of the members present and I see it as our duty to pass the budget here today. There's some elements of this budget I wish were not as they are. It is clear that the Council as a whole is being backed into a different situation and the funding models from the Government need to be changed but it is essential that the public services people rely on from the Council don't come to a crashing halt, so with that in mind I am proposing the budget before us is adopted by the Council.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Corrigan.
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and I would like to formally second the budget. Thank you.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you, members. I will now proceed to a vote. Councillor Danny Alvey?
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Mark Barry?
COUNCILLOR BARRY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Joe Behan?
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne? Not present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Tom Fortune? Not present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peir Leonard?
COUNCILLOR LEONARD: For.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Pat Mahon?
COUNCILLOR MAHON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Miriam Murphy?
COUNCILLOR MURPHY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?
COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Against.
MS GILLESPIE: Against. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Stephen Stokes?

COUNCILLOR STOKES: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor John Ward?
COUNCILLOR WARD: Against.
MS PURCELL: Against. Councillor Ned Whelan?
COUNCILLOR WHELAN: For.
MS GILLESPIE: For. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS GILLESPIE: That's 25 for, 2 against and 4 not present. Therefore the budget is passed. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: We just have one item, there's the suspension of standing orders.
MR GLEESON: Sorry, Cathaoirleach, can I come in?
CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah.
MR GLEESON: I want to thank all the staff in the finance section who worked on this budget. A huge amount of work went into it so I would like to put that on record, especially Denise Kinsella and Michael Sheehy who did tremendous work on that. I would like to acknowledge the comments by Councillor Behan about the format. I would love to take credit for it but it is all the staff, Councillor Behan, but I agree with you it looks a lot better this year and that'll be the template going forward. Thank you.
MS O'GORMAN: Just as well to thank Brian and all the directors and all the staff again, Denise and Michael in particular, for the huge amount of work. I want to thank the members too. This has not been an easy process. I know we all understand where we are with it. We have significant funding shortfalls, we have increasing gaps in what we're being funded for from central government and various different programmes, and I know you have raised that where you can with the Minister and otherwise, and I appreciate that. And I do appreciate the time and consideration that you have given to this budget process. So thank you very much.
MS GILLESPIE: Thank you. So now the suspension of standing orders proposed by Councillor Peter Stapleton and seconded by Councillor Silvester Bourke: "That this Council, in considering the Capital Investment Programme 2027-2029, will develop a scheme to provide for a Municipal District Capital Fund of up to €5,000,000 over the remaining term of the Council, being €1,000,000 per Municipal District, funded from available development contributions, on the following basis:

The fund is for medium to large capital projects, with no allocation of less than €100,000 Projects are brought forward as business cases by the Municipal Districts, each approved by a majority of the members of that district; In assessing a business case the Chief Executive shall have regard to the development contributions already committed to projects in the district, the class of infrastructure under the development contribution scheme, council and national policy and local delivery capacity." Thank you.

MS O'GORMAN: Very briefly, members. I welcome this proposal. I think it gives an awful lot of structure to the development contributions and how they are spent across municipal districts. So I just want to say I welcome the proposal and I think it will work really well for the members. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Is there any dissent? No. So, agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you, everyone. That's the end of today's budget meeting. Thank you. You all kept time very well and we are out of here for lunch.

MS PURCELL: Lunch is in the canteen, there's soup and sandwiches for everybody if you want to make your way up. Thank you very much.

(Meeting concluded at 12:21 pm)

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