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ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL HELD

VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

ON

MONDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2021 FROM 11:00-15:00

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TRANSCRIPT OF MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 29TH 2021:

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Morning, all, can you hear me? Anyway, good morning, everyone. Welcome to our Annual Budget Meeting. I am just going to hand you over to Helen for a roll call and just meeting etiquette please, just one seconds.

ADMINISTRATOR: So we are back to fully online meetings, back to the previous etiquette. We would ask that your mobile phones are switched to silent. Please not leave the meeting without informing the Cathaoirleach to ensure a quorum remains. If you use the hand function when you want to interject in the discussion. Speakers should keep their cameras and microphone on while speaking and while not speaking please keep your microphone on mute. If you lose connectivity ring myself or Teresa and we will get you back into the meeting. I would also like to welcome the press and members of the public as well as the elected members. We will go with a roll call now.

[ROLL CALL TAKEN]

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Just moving on to votes of sympathy.

Before I go on to that, could I just ask members to use the hand signal on the screen in order to facilitate everyone. Obviously this is back on the full Zoom platform, so just in order for me to see everyone, I need to see the hand function being used if possible. So if I could just go to votes of sympathy, first of all.

ADMINISTRATOR: We have two, we think of Steven Budda Kavanagh, brother of our colleague, Elizabeth Clarke and Eddie Kavanagh. Also Nora Flynn, mother of our colleague, Michael Flynn.

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Anyone else? I would like to remember Ritchie O'Neill from Aughrim. Unfortunately lost his battle to cancer, just to remember his wife Jean and son Shane and extended family. Cllr Paul O'Brien.

CLLR P O'BRIEN: I would also like to remember Michael O'Reilly uncle of Steven Budda Kavanagh and be associated with Budda's condolences as well, thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Gail Dunne.

CLLR DUNNE: I would like to be associated with them remarks, Steven Budda Kavanagh and Michael, whose daughter worked for the council as well.

CLLR P KENNEDY: I would like to be associated with the votes of sympathy to Ritchie O'Neill in Aughrim to his wife Jean and son Shane and also to Fitch Moules from Aughrim. One of the first people to referee an all-Ireland on television.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. There is no one else showing at the moment. Okay. So we will just pause for a moment's silence.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Eternal rest grant on to them, oh, Lord. May they rest in peace.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Before we go on to item number one on our agenda we have a request for a suspension of standing orders. Cllr Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: Simply I would provide we suspend standing orders at the end of the budget meeting to discuss the implications for Wicklow County Council arising from the announcement of an amalgamation of Bray Wanderers and Cabinteely FC. As you know Wicklow County Council is the owner of the Carlisle Grounds and we have a sporting lease with Bray Wanderers which is a

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Bray-based Wicklow team. I want for two or three minutes to discuss the implications of this announcement that was made on Friday with regard to that particular issue. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor, are we all agreed with that? Yeah. Okay. Agreed. Cllr Grace McManus, I assume it's the same issue?

CLLR McMANUS: That is fine, I was going to second it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will discuss at the end of the budget meeting. Okay. Thank you. Okay, moving on to the agenda, item number one to consider and adopt the Wicklow County Council Draft Annual Budget for the financial year, ended the 21st of December 2022. I am sure you are all aware of the budget and what is before you today. So before I hand over to Director of Finance, Brian Gleeson, I am just going to ask the Chief Executive to come in first of all.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Look the budget, as you can see is 128 million, it's an 8.5% increase on last year, that is a 10 million increase. Those increases are in the areas of increase pay and pension, housing services, climate action initiatives, library services and discretionary services for the Municipal Districts. Covid will continue to be a priority now and right into the new year, as we have always said from the start, our priorities are number one to protect our staff, two to continue to deliver our services and three to support our communities. That remains the priority.

There is 7.5 million rates waiver given out between January and September, 760,000 in relation to small business assistance schemes and it looks like 80%

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of our direct Covid costs will now be covered by central Government, but we have allowed for over 100,000 in terms of PPE for Covid related expenditure.

In relation to the budget in general, there is no cuts to frontline services, there is no increase in the ARV for commercial rates proposed. The 6% increase in LPT as you know is ring-fenced. It's over a million ring-fenced for discretionary funding across the five MDs. There is an extra 100,000 in Bray MD. There is 700 match funding for capital project. 200,000 of that will be for the Content Creation Hub. Major focus on climate action.

Next year we will see the establishment of the Mideast Energy Bureau. Wicklow County Council will be the lead and that will allow for resources working specifically on projects in relation to Wicklow's energy and emission reduction requirements. Total cost is 400,000, a contribution of 67,000 from each of the three local authorities. 60,000 has been allocated for the Arklow decarbonisation implementation plan. 170,000 in the LED replacement programme which will commence in 2022. There is 20,000 allocated for EV charging points. In relation to housing reletting repairs have increased to 3.85 million. Housing repair has increased by 150,000 to just over two million. The community grant scheme allocation of 120,000 will be retained. The Mermaid Centre 25,000 allocation is maintained also. The Library Book Fund. 100,000 reinstated for 2022, after a temporary reduction in 2021. So the total funding is now 300,000 per annum. There is extra staff members in ICT planning,

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housing, sports partnership and emergency services. The playground grant of 100,000 is reinstated in 2022 after a temporary reduction in 2021.

The mobile recycling allocation is maintained at 48,000 and there is an additional 70,000 to be provided in respect of Wicklow and Arklow Harbours in respect of other capital dredging projects. Overall it's a positive budget, I would like to thank the team for sticking to strict budgetary management and maximising our income on the grants and subs tees. That is what allows us to present a budget like this. I will head over to the head of finance for a detailed presentation.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. I will hand you over to Brian, head of finance.

BRIAN GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you, Chief Executive, I will just try and share the presentation first.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Could I ask all members to make sure you are on mute if possible, just so there is no interference. Okay, is that showing up now? First page, yes.

BRIAN GLEESON: Good morning, members. I am just going to start off by summarising the areas that we will go through in the presentation this morning. We will start off and give an overview of the budgetary process, look at the planned expenditure and income for 2022 as well as the budgetary challenges we face next year. We will then outline the budget policy decisions we have made and go to the specific adjustments that have been made in the budget in comparison to 2021. We will then review the commercial rates. We

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have a couple of decisions to make in relation to the ARV and the rates relief. Then there will be a budget review by service division at the end.

Just to go through the budget process again, everyone is very familiar with it, the first stage is the Local Property Tax variation decision. We had an earlier meeting this year on the 27th of July on this matter and the decision was made to increase the rate by 6%. That was on the proviso that 100% of that funding would be ring-fenced for the discretionary fund for Municipal Districts as is the case. That has been included in the budget. The next stage was the Municipal District Budgetary Plan. That was issued in mid-October. It included general Municipal allocation which was all the levels of discretionary funding that is available to the Districts. So that was approved by all five Municipal Districts. The adoption of the Statutory Budget takes place today and then the final stage is the schedule of the Municipal District works. That takes place usually in April of next year, following the receipt of the roads allocations. It's put together then and it's split by between indirect and direct costs by Municipal District.

So we have three decisions, formal decisions to make here today. The first one is to agree the ARV, the annual rate of valuation for 2022 commercial rates. The current rate stands at 0.217. We have agreed a rates relief percentage on vacant premises. That stands at 60%. And then we have to adopt the statutory budget for 2022. As the Chief Executive said we have 128 million in our budget this year. That is a big increase of over 8% on last year. The main areas are

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housing and building, 38.5 million, road, transportation and safety, 26.3, water services, 7.3, development management 15.6, environmental services 14.4, recreation and amenity 10.9, agriculture, health and welfare, 1.9 and miscellaneous services 12.8. How do we fund that? Local Property Tax comes to about 13.1. So that includes the additional one million, as part of the 6% increase. Our commercial rates is approximately 32 million, goods and services, which would include rent income and... sorry. Sorry my slides for some reason aren't moving.

Sorry which slide is showing at the moment?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Just the first page.

BRIAN GLEESON: It's moving now, is it? Sorry about that. That is the table I was referring to, the 128 million broken down by division. As you say, there is the income sources, Local Property Tax 13.1, commercial rates 32 million, goods and services 39 million and grants and subsidies 44 million. If we just discuss now the budget challenges we face for the coming year. We have the ongoing financial impact of Covid-19, as the Chief Executive mentioned we had a rates waiver in 2020 of 13.3 million. We have a rates waiver of 7.5 million this year, excluding the fourth quarter waiver that has been brought in for the hospitality sector. We have also received funding in relation to goods and services, losses of income. There is an assumption as part of the budget here that those supports will be continuing into 2022 if the need arises. We have increased pay and pensions. This happens every year at the National Pay Agreement. It covers about one million of the increases. We have compensation of about 800,000 for that...

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry to interrupt you, you are still on the same slide.

BRIAN GLEESON: All right, I will get Terry to try and sort it.

Right, okay. I think we have sorted it now. Okay, we are on budget challenges.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah.

BRIAN GLEESON: Great. As we were saying pay and pension, the National Pay Agreement is a million euro. We get compensated of about 900,000.

Our year on year pension costs increases between pensions new retirements and gratuity payments comes to about 600,000 and also any new positions and replacement of vacancies also has to be applied to the budget this year. We have seen a demand, there is huge demands on housing relet services year on year. We are spending about four million per annum in that area. We have seen an increased demand in housing, repairs and maintenance as we allocate more houses out. That budget will also increase. There is a continual demand for road improvements. We could probably spend twice as much money as we have on our roads and also we are very much aware of the climate action commitments that we have and the energy targets that we face as an organisation and as a country.

We also have the continued match funding commitments and we hope to continue our success in that area in relation to funding we have received under URDF town village of Clara and Failte Ireland. The minimum contribution is about 25%, so if we can't provide that funding from development levies, that is

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why we need this pot of money to be put away year on year so we can draw down and implement the major capital projects. However, regardless of all of these challenges, as for the legislation we must approve the balanced budget here today. I suppose just to outline the difficulties that we do have in relation to this is the fact that 90% of our budget would be considered nondiscretionary costs. 40% of our budget relates to pay roll costs, salary, wages, pensions. Another large percentage relates to grant-funded item, including RAS, roads funds, Irish Water and the machinery yard. In this case, even if we cut expenditure in these areas, the corresponding income would also be cut so it doesn't impact the bottom line. Other discretionary costs would be light and heat, insurance, loan interest, capital transfer, statutory contributions and rates write offs in that we don't have much of a choice on these areas. That leaves us with 10% of what we would consider discretionary costs. Regional roads, local maintenance our own resource element. Public lighting, housing and repairs and maintenance, community grant scheme. Environmental issues, arts and festival, the library book purchases, economic supports and match-funding for capital programmes. Also discretionary funding for the Municipal Districts.

I appreciate now a lot of the members, if not all the members would say that list of services would be essential services but, I suppose, they are considered discretionary in that we have a choice whether to increase them or decrease them as, where as the other listing we don't have any sort of choice in relation to that.

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Just to highlight against the Local Property Tax decision back in July to increase the provision by one million and ring-fence all of that for discretionary funding. The result of that was that Bray MD received 264,000 and the other four Municipal Districts have 194,000 to spend on public realm works in their area. As mentioned in October we issued the General Municipal Allocation. That included the one million for discretionary funding but also was supplemented by a number of other initiatives and funding areas that the local MDs can spend in their area. We brought back in town twinning, 31,000. Hopefully it's not positive at the moment with Covid, but hopefully we will be able to implement and spend some of that money next year at some stage. Economic development and promotion, 67,500. That would include contributions to the Tidy Towns around the county and we have festivals for both Christmas and other festivals throughout the year and a small provision for civic receptions. Hopefully we will get to run a couple of those off during the year as well.

Just to mention the corporate policy group input. The Local Government Act provides for consultation with the corporate policy group on framing the budget. The CPG should assist with the setting of overall parameters and the identification of issues and the approaches to be taken. The CPG met this morning and previous to that on the 1st of November and the 15th of November. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members for their input and direction in relation to framing the budget this year. I suppose two of the key issues from the first meeting, when we put forward the proposals to

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the CPG and I think at that stage we probably had a funding gap of about three million. The direction from the group was to avoid, I suppose at all costs, an increase to commercial rates or any reduction to local and regional roads and I am glad to announce that this budget adheres to that request and ensures that those adjustments don't take place.

The adjustments that have taken place in relation to the 2022 budget. I will just go through a few of the main ones. In relation to housing we are seeing an increase of our pre-letting allocation, up 350,000 to 3.85 million. Housing repairs and maintenance sees an increase of 334,000 across the five Municipal Districts that brings it to 2.1 million in total. The establishment of the Energy Bureau 400,000, as the Chief Executive mentioned, 67,000 is the Wicklow County Council contribution, 200,000 comes from SEAI and Meath County Council and Kildare County Council also contribute 67,000 each. So there will be a number of contract resources that will be provided with this money. We will have a Regional Energy Manager, three local officers and a community officer working across the three areas. So that is a very exciting initiative to look forward to next year.

We also have the Arklow Decarbonisation Zone that was named this year. We have set aside a budget of 67,000 for a number of initiatives and to put forward a plan in relation to that for the coming year. The Library Book Fund and the play grounds, you may recall that last year, in order to balance the budget, we reduced both areas by 100,000 on a one-off basis on the proviso

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that they would both be reintroduced in budget 2022. So that has been the case. We have increased the library book fund by 100,000, back up to 300 for the full budget for the year and the play grounds, capital works has been increased by 100,000 as well.

We are retaining the match funding capital provision of 700,000 to go towards, as I said earlier, the URDF and town and village, etc, schemes, where we have applied for funding. 200,000 of that 700,000 relates to the Content Creation Hub in Clermont.

We are maintaining the Community Grant Scheme, 120,000 is being retained, the same level as last year.

The mobile recycling is to be maintained at 48,000. There is no proposal to reduce the contribution made to the Mermaid Centre in Bray 325,000. Also in relation to the LED replacement programme for our public lighting, we hope to have that project commenced. This is a national project, the lead authority being Kilkenny and there is a number of different stages that that is being rolled out in. We hope maybe in the middle of next year that will commence. We have a provision of 130 included in the budget to cover our loan repayments. You will recall the members approved a loan of eight million, probably about 12 months ago at this stage in the chamber.

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So it's good to see that programme actually commencing now in the next few months. We have also included 70,000 in the budget in respect of Wicklow and Arklow Harbour in relation to dredging and capital works that are required in those areas.

The MPR income has been reduced from 500,000 to 400,000. This is due to the elimination of the 2009 charge that took place at the start of August 2021 and the 2010 charge will be eliminated on the 1st of April 2022.

Our IPB commercial dividend has been reduced from 487,000 to 151,000. However this has been offset by the fact that our premium for next year has also been reduced by 309,000. That is due to, I suppose the good work across all the districts on foot paths, etc that has reduced our number of claims. As mentioned earlier, there is an assumption made as part of the budget that funding and support will be available from the Government, if required, depending how the impact of Covid over the coming 12 months.

Now there is a table there in your book that was circulated, it is on page 8 and 9. If it's easier to read I will go through. They are the main expenditure variances, pre-letting repairs, as I have already mentioned up by 354,000 and 50,000 respectfully. We have also increased central heating provision by 36,000. RAS there is a new recruitment process which has been brought in which has led to funding of 370,000. I will inform the members there are discussions ongoing between the CCMA, the Department on this matter. If a

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new procedure and agreed procedure is brought in in 2022, hopefully that will eliminate that and if that is the case that provision will be retained within the housing area, but at the moment we have to put in that funding gap until such changes are agreed.

Payment and availability agreements, a big increase of 4.2 million. That is fully covered by funding. Roads programme, the total roads has increased by 251,000. Planning control up by 200,000 in relation to replacement of new provisions. Town twinning. As we have seen we have brought back in over 30,000. Fire service operations, we have seen an increase of over 100,000, recycling services, 139,000. Energy Bureau and the Arklow decarbonisation zone we have also mentioned as well as the harbours. Leisure centres has been reduced by 80,000. Just to give background on that, that relates to the Coral Centres in Arklow and Wicklow.

IPB commercial dividend is reduced from 487,000 to 151,000. Off set by the fact that the premium for next year is reduced by 309,000. Due to the good work across all of the districts on footpaths, et cetera that reduced the number of claimants. As mentioned earlier, there is a sanction made as a part of the budget that funding and payment and availability, increased by 4.2 million, covered by funding. The roads, the increase is 251,000. Planning control up 200,000 in relation to replacement and positions. Town twinning we brought back in over 30,000. The Fire Service operations increased to 100,000, recycling services 139,000. Energy and the decarbonisation zone we

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mentioned as well as the harbours. Leisure centres reduced by 80,000. To give background, that is in relation to the centres in Arklow and County Wicklow. You may recall that the Budget to them increased by 200,000 in the 2021 Budget to cover impact on COVID and to ensure the centres carried on and stayed open during the pandemic.

Obviously, the centres are back open now. But it is still a challenge. So we have reduced that increase of 200,000 by 80,000. So, in real terms they are still up 120,000. The library book fund and the play grounds, were increased back by 100,000. The Sports Partnership, was a number of new positions that are fully funded by Sports Ireland. That has been included which is 250,000.

The rates, G Factor has been reduced by 742,000. We have a provision that we set up which is about 2.5 million a year.

It covers losses that will have as rate payers make appeals to the valuation tribunal, following the evaluation rates took place in 2019 as they are heard, we will reduce the G Factor to recover the losses the figure is based on the appeals heard to date. There were about 41 heard so far. We still have over 100 to be heard.

So, that provision of 2.5 million will be reduced by the amount of 740,000. The rates write off provision is reduced by about 800,000 down from 2.9 to 2.1 million. We did analysis on the vacant premises and rate payers over 12 months due to the rates waiver scheme, the 2020 rates waiver scheme to allow the vacant premises to apply for the waiver for the 2021 scheme, to make them ineligible to apply for the scheme, so as a part of the process to

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identify who qualified for the waiver, we have done a huge amount of work. Based on that we feel we can reduce the write-off provision by 800,000 and still have enough to cover our annual write-offs. As mentioned, the discretionary expenditure is increased by 1 million due to the LPT and pension area gratuity, increases 674,000. Area gratuities amount to about 350,000 and the normal pension costs are 324,000. IPB premium, reduced by 309,000. So to move on to the income variances within the Budget. On housing, pre-letting and payment and availability agreements, as we say, that are contra so the increase expenditure is covered by additional funding that we expect to receive. Creative Ireland, the arts initiative, we are seeing an increase in provision of 74,000 for the coming year. We mentioned the energy bureau, the contribution from SEAI and the two our County Councils, that comes to 333,000. Fire charges we project an increase of 150,000. We expect additional funding of 20,000 for the provision of EV charges across the county. Sports Partnership, as mentioned, that is fully covered from Sports Ireland funding for new positions.

The commercial rates, there is a table in the actual book which gives a detailed breakdown of the movements of the commercial rates between global, re-evaluations and Valuation Tribunal appeals, and new bills and revisions to existing premises. So, when all of those are applied, there is a small increase of 148,000. That is for the commercial rates Budget for the coming year but still in and around the 32 million mark. NPPR is reduced by 1100,000 and the IPB dividend, 336,000 and increased funding from the department of 833,000 to compensate for the pay agreements, the pay increases under the National Pay

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Agreement, coming over 1 million euro and the last is additional income from the local property tax, offset by the expenditure on the discretionary funding. In relation to the decision to take on the commercial rates, ARV, the ongoing pandemic and the qualifying businesses, it is targeted for the businesses in the hospital, arts and entertainment sector, we feel it is prudent and the best approach to take to leave the ARV unchanged at 0.217 for 2022.

In relation to the commercial rates, the vacancy relief rate, the recommendation is to retain the current percentage of 60% for 2022, this will continue to complement the council's rate scheme for new businesses to reoccupy vacant premises and thinking past to the local charities, the average across the rate is 58/57 percent, so align with that nationally, and to bear in mind increase to the rate would generate additional cost to the Budget, so somewhere else would be cut if it were increased to 70 or to 80%. So to summarise, as the Chief Executive said, I think it is extremely positive a Budget, considering the circumstances we have faced over the last 12-18 months and the circumstances that we will be facing over the coming 12 months. It sees an 8% increase on the 2021 Budget over 9 million. Avoiding cuts to the frontline services. As you say, no additional charges to the local businesses in the form of commercial rates. Listening to the CPG and not making reductions to the road programmes, importantly it sees increases to the housing repairs and to maintenance and pre-letting Budgets, we are establishing a new energy bureau for which the Wicklow County Council is the lead authority. Restoring 100,000 for the library book fund and playground maintenance and we have the

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provision of over 1 million in discretionary funding for the Municipal Districts for the local, public works.

So, that concludes the presentation part of the morning.

We will now look at Budget review by division. We are grouping them together to make it easier. So starting off with division A housing and division B, roads first. In relation to detail. The housing figures can be found on page 58. Also 69 to 71, covering expenditure of 38.5 million and income of 40.1 million. And the roads on pages 59 and 72-74 to cover 26.3 million and income of 15.6 million.

Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. As usual, Brian, a comprehensive report. I know you have put a lot of time and effort into it, to congratulate you on that, it is very well put together. As Brian has said, we are opening it up now but we will do the first two areas, we will concentrate on is housing and roads. So, if you have questions for housing and roads, and we will then move on later to water and so on, development, management but housing and roads to start off.

I will take questions. Councillor Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: To take the housing first of all.

In my, from what I can see at the moment in Bray, there are roughly about 20 vacant local authority houses.

It looks like this Budget or the present Budget for this year, are not going to be able to ensure that the work is done so that the houses can be relet.

I wanted to ask the Finance Officer, why is this? Considering that the Government made a huge play on the fact that filling voids, getting voids back

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into use was to be a major plank of the government policy. Is it that some internal change has happened within Wicklow County Council finance/housing departments? Or has the Government turned off the tap of funding to ensure that the vacant houses relet? It has to be one or the other. Certainly, I appreciate clarity on that for the sake of all of the people on the housing list in Bray and it may be replicated around the county, I don't know but looking at Bray, it is at least 20, it could be more than that. Can I take the opportunity to again, to salute the two staff members working in the Disabled Persons Grant section? They have done an absolutely magnificent job. I am talking about John Dunne and the administrator within the section as well, Tamara Mulbourke [sic] for getting the funding through to the people that need it. I noticed in last week's paper an advertisement to encourage people to apply for the grant as there is obviously some money available. I want to salute all people in housing but particularly those two employees for the magnificent job that they are doing. And to ask the question, it may be for the Chief Executive or the Finance Officer. Is it not the case, if we had additional staff there, we may be able to get more of the grant money spent before the end of the year? I also want to mention with regards to the road section, if I can move on to that for a minute or two, Cathaoirleach.

We know that, I suppose technically, the parallel road is completed at Kilmackenik [sic] but there are still outstanding issue, one is the noise factor from the traffic travelling closer to the homes as a result of the parallel road and secondly the safety factor. There is a lower speed limit but it is not being obeyed and there are serious danger issues for the people that live, the 4 or 5

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that live within residences on the parallel road can I ask if the final safety work has been completed on the section? Has money been drawn down to complete that particular scheme? I will be concerned that we have unfinished business, this Cathaoirleach and certainly in the interests of knowing the position of the council is on that matter?

CLLR KENNEDY: If I can thank the CPG, who Brian and I met 3 times to get the balanced Budget so thank you to all there. So, look, there is a lot of good in the Budget in relation to the districts and in relation to what is outlined but there is a one thing I'm a little disappointed within the Budget, the fact that the house repairs, while it is welcomed the I decisional 154,000, to see only 1.2 million to cover the county is disappointing, when you think about it, we take in 3 million Euros in rents. To see only 2.1 million, for house repairs. A little disappointed with that but overall I am happy with the Budget but disappointed with that. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Mitchell?

CLLR MITCHELL: I want to make a general point in two particular areas. Just to say that the district Budget for Greystones is half of what the other areas get. Staff are half or a third of what the other areas are. I am concerned about that. I have raised it in, gently, for the past 5 years and voted for the Budget for the last 20 years as I believe in that but basically, last year, it was made considerably worse with the Greystones area getting the least increase of any spending in any area so resulting in the ludicrous situation of having a 60,000 street sweeper kept in the depot for most of the five years as there is no staff to drive it. The area is expanding fast and lots needs doing. While Brian is

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coming up with an explanation partly to do with less counsel unfortunately homes, it is not part of the funding. It is said that local government is about providing services to people, not to providing services to square kilometres. If we compare [inaudible] this is a much smaller area than Wicklow, with many more people and a double Budget of what Wicklow gets and the Chief Executive is going there in January. I doubt if he will be telling them to spend less than County Wicklow as it is a smaller area but that is what Greystones has been told. So I appreciate it takes some years to change. Which is why I've been raiding it for five years, I, it has gone the wrong way the last year, so I am concerned about that.

Now I want to see some sort of study as well about what staff are needed, I just don't believe that the area is properly staffed at all. I know that most other areas probably say that but the expansion has been enormous. So, I am not prepared to support the based on that, it is important, it needs to be changed. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I will bring in Cllr Lavery on the roads question from Councillor Behan and then on to housing.

CLLR LAVERY: Yes, in relation to the safety audit, there is a draft safety audit that needs to be signed off by the auditor and the designer in terms of the outstanding works that are required in the area.

So, once that is available, signed off, we can make it available to the Councillor Behan. In terms of the speed limit there, there is a 50-kilometre speed limit in the parallel service road. We have had discussions with Shay Conor to monitor the speed limits in the area and the speed limit on the main line is 60

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kilometres an hour to be reviewed with current speed limit and that is undertaken county wide and has just recently commenced. In terms of noise, some of the residents have indicated that there they are experiencing greater levels of noise. We have brought that to the attention of TII. As you are aware, we also have to produce a Noise Action Plan, so we are undertaking noise ... carrying out soundings in relation to the various motorways and the noise and the county is a part of the noise action plan. Where the noise is above accepted levels, we are required under the Noise Action Plan we are taking measures to deal with that. That is the position on the 3 issue accounts raised by Councillor Behan.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will bring in Joe, the Director of Housing. Followed by Brian.

JOE: We have reached in expenditure for this year. We have laid down the expenditure, that will be dealt with at the start of next year. In general, as we are getting units particularly in Bray and people know that the units are coming in, the problem is that we are targeting downsizing and transfer times which leaves [inaudible] at the back end. Some of the units where there has not been investment. We will be going with this to the SPC to look at a pilot scheme to bring some units in but will not go to the normal standard. Normally, I cannot remember the expenditure, it is normally about 30,000 for relets. Next year we may have to do a pilot where we will be doing less work in some of the units, given them back out again and people are willing and that, we will talk to the SPC on that, to look at a pilot scheme where the houses in less desirable areas may have to be boarded up longer, the rest, not subject to the full renovation

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and we pick it up later on. We will do it as a part of the, what do they call it ... the project ... the Fabric Upgrade Scheme and other schemes going forward. But some of them going back we may not be able to do the full refurbish, which allows us then to extend the work further. As Brian has said, if the national issue regarding the recouping to sort it, that he may give us an extra 350, it may leave us with extra work to re-lets ... the relets are bigger, there is a core legislation with the schemes and the new housing coming in and the allocations. I think for the first time ever, last year one, we were over 400 allocations this year and a percentage of those are transfers, that create back to allocations, we are anxious to get them going. Bray has been [distortion of sound] after a year, we have had a number of units this year and in the Dagan Hall in particular, we have aimed that for downsizing so issues going forward in the short-term. After the SPC we will look at the pilot and it will, it may create a quicker turnover but the down side to that the units will not be up to the full standard, being handed out. The last thing to point out is that the building linked to DPGs builder inflation is kicking in significantly. We find for both DPGs there are lots of contractors, it is getting more difficult to create works for relets and DPGs in general. Again, with the construction industry, to the good side of it but there is [distortion of sound] on the smaller jobs.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I will bring in Brian to conclude on the questions.

BRIAN: To follow-up, to bray, there is a provision of 828,000 provided in the Budget for pre-letting works.

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So as Joe said, early next year, it should be sufficient to start working on those. The voids that are there at the moment. Also to clarify as Joe has said, he is right. The net expenditure for the Budget is 3 million regardless of the allocations at the moment we have in the Budget 3.85 million, covered by 850,000 of funding if the funding amount increases say up to 1.5 million, then the extend tower on pre-letting increases up to 4.5 million. So agreeing with Joe to keep the net 3 million. This is just a Budget. If we get funding it will be ring-fenced and to increase the provision within the area. Regarding Councillor Kennedy's point in relation to housing repairs and maintenance in Arklow, to state that the Budget has 428,000 for housing repairs and maintenance for the Arklow Municipal District, and a further 547,000 for pre-letting costs that brings Knockanrahan Upper to under 1 million for housing repairs and pre-let's in the Arklow Municipal District for the 2022.

In relation to the Councillor Mitchell's points, I think that we have said to one another on the phone but may have to agree to disagree the arguments about avoiding expenditure allocation by population, it is not comparing like with like but to go into the individual expenditure lines as in the housing repairs and maintenance is based on the numbers of social housing in a district. There is no recycling in Greystones so there is a variation there. And also the variation in the fire operations. In both, there are areas where there are two fire stations, Greystones has one. So you have to look at the individual and divide. So, that is the situation. The staffing situation in Greystones, a workforce plan was agreed with the unions, the department and the management in 2019. We are fully committed to filling all the current vacancies in relation to that workforce plan

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and all of the positions there, and the Chief Executive at the CPG this morning did commit to undertaking a review of outdoor work numbers across all of the five Municipal Districts, not just Greystones, because I think that every district would say that they need more people and have more demands. So I think it is only fair that a review will cover all districts.

So, I think that is all of the questions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Moving on. Councillor Anne Ferris.

CLLR FERRIS: Congratulations to Brian and to the CPG and to everyone in the finance department and the directors for producing such a good Budget this year. I think it is, it really is very, very positive. We don't see cuts that we would have had concerned about in other years. And I am also happy that the Bray Municipal District received 160,000 in the discretionary fund created by the local property tax. But have I to say that this time last year or December of last year as the Cathaoirleach of the Bray Municipal District I proposed the increase in the car parking charges on the seafront from 30 cents to 50 cents an hour. Have I to say that I am absolutely delighted that we are getting an extra 100,000 euro for the Bray Budget as a result of that modest price increase. And again, I would like to thank Brian for that. And also to thank, as it was voted on in the Bray Municipal District and it was ratified by the members of Wicklow County Council. I am delighted with the support I received at the time from the Councillor to put the needs of the Bray people first before their own political careers. So I think it is very important. Just to say to Derek and to Councillor Mitchell to look at the parking charges in Greystones. We introduced the parking increase, it was only a 20-cent increase, we now receive, at the end of

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the year an extra 100,000 euro, that is to be very welcomed. I am delighted by that. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Thank you are Brian for the detailed presentation. Two points and one or a more general narrative in the document. Firstly disappointed to see there is no reference whatsoever to affordable housing. Lots of mention of aspects of housing but affordable housing is a massive issue within the county and a huge problem for hundreds of people, mainly young people. And disappointed that there is nothing mentioned, even in the document.

Secondly, also, on housing, I see there that we are putting out expressions of interest for people to provide housing on council land. I have no problem in principle with that but the problem is that we seem to be abdicating our responsibility for providing social housing. The outcome of that is that when we don't provide social housing, we leave it to others to do so. Council tenants, do not have the opportunities to purchase their own home.

That is a model that has been in County Wicklow since the year dot, since we first started building houses. Whenever it was. People have been renting houses and then had the opportunity to buy them. We were actually moving away from that policy. That has been a very, very successful policy in this County. You know, that I think it is something that we really need to look at seriously. I know that we have to provide housing quickly. I understand that but we seem to be abdicating and the implications of this mean that our

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tenants will not have the opportunity to buy house. I think that is wrong. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor McManus?

CLLR MCMANUS: A small comment. I I'm disappointed to see that the homeless outreach service for Bray is not included under the homeless objectives. The eight Bray Municipal District members agreed that homeless outreach was needed in Bray as it cost people so much to present as homely to Wicklow County Council buildings, Brian if you can comment on that, Joe, if it is included, or if we have to put it in writing. I know it is a high price for the homeless people in Bray who need that service there.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, Joe, I will bring you in on those points on housing.

JOE: The affordable... affordable, there is no reflection, the absence of a reflection in the revenue account of affordable doesn't indicate we won't be doing work on it. Would be more on the capital account and at the next housing meeting, it's scheduled in December, there is two parts of it. There will be a presentation on the Housing For All Government policy that was issued recently and there will also be on the housing delivery plan, which is the plan for the next five years, for 2022-26. So that will be on the next meeting and that will detail some with regard to housing and the social housing and affordable housing going forward. The second part of that question was the expression of interest and I think that is the one you are talking about recently. If that is and correct me if I am wrong, if asked the question, that is not for local authority land, that expression of interest is for mainly for affordable

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housing, for developers who are in a position, who have the capacity and will build for the local authority, either affordable or social. So it has moved from 30 years ago when we had the turnkey one to now developers who will do mixed tenure schemes which include affordable and social, or social recently. That was just advertised in the last week. So I am assuming, Cllr Timmins that is what you are talking about.

CLLR TIMMINS: That is just on, it refers to just council land, expression of interest on council land. It's not private land.

JOE: I think that might be, I will come back to you on that, because I think we need to tidy that one.

CLLR TIMMINS: It's on the narrative, on the document there. I will tell you what page.

JOE: I will come back to you personally on that.

CLLR TIMMINS: Page 13.

JOE: In general Wicklow County Council advertised recently that. Is for developers for planning permission to apply to Wicklow County Council and we will give them, or apply with them in partnership to get the Affordable Housing Fund Grant, which is in most cases up to 50,000. They may release affordable. That is the first one to get out of that today. The particular issue I will come back to you on. The third issue is, sorry just give me a second. The third issue is on the.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Homeless outreach.

JOE: We have been in touch with Simon. We are look at costing for that for the Bray issue, we will come back to you on the SPC issue, but we have asked

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Simon, one of the partnerships to help us in that regard and we will come back to you in that regard. We are working on something for 2022 on that one.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, Cllr Walsh.

CLLR WALSH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just two quick points. Firstly on the housing and Cllr Kennedy's point and he is disappointed that the 2.1 million on housing repairs and maintenance. I am looking at the rent arrears figure there and it's currently, end of September it's 2.8 million, it was 2.4 at the end of September 2020. I am just wondering, I know there is reference to it on page 12 there, it's an objective for 2022 to reduce tenants for arrears. I am just wondering are there any long-term arrears there going back over a period of time included in that. But look, that straight away, that money could be put back into housing repairs and maintenance it would make a big difference to that overall figure. So look it, I might be mentioning this, as I said for the last number of meetings now, so I would hope to see some improvement on that figure over the coming months. Secondly, just to come back to Cllr Mitchell's points on Greystones and we discussed this this morning at CPG, the staffing levels, I know Greystones figures are way below what they should be, two immediate replacements required there, I accept the Chief Executive's commitments to have those things addressed via the workforce plan. But this seems to take an inordinate amount of time to fill these vacancies. Overall I also brought up the review should be carried out into the overall numbers across all districts and I welcome that that review was going to be carried out. Finally, just on the metric being used for the road maintenance budget and the metric using the kilometres distance of roads, it's not fit for purpose in the

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sense that roads in a more remote area will not require the same maintenance such as those more populated areas such as Greystones. Again I like to see that reflected in the schedule of Municipal District works which is due out in the springtime. Again to reflect the usage as a component there of the allocation there with the actual distance just to address that anomaly. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Jodie Neary.

CLLR NEARY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I very much welcome the additional funding in play grounds and also for the energy bureau as a member of the Climate Action SPC. I also want to reiterate Cllr Walsh's point about the staffing issue for Greystones Municipal District. We are in dire need of outdoor staff. As you know Greystones Tidy Towns has been doing a huge amount of work as has Tidy Towns during the pandemic with extra litter and foot traffic, but they are under a lot of pressure. They really need the access to council staff and the supports of the outdoor team. So I would urge as well that work be carried out immediately to address the vacancies that are there in the Greystones district. I would also like to see a staffing audit of SPCs for climate action SPC to look at the real needs of staffing that we will have to have to implement our climate action plan. There is going to be a need for a biodiversity officer, a tree policy officer, etc and I do welcome that the energy bureau will bring in some extra staff, but overall we do need them as well in the everyday work that we do in the council and not just recently.

I also want to, just on the parking point that was made earlier by Cllr Ferris. Each district is different in that regard, Greystones has taken part in a lot of

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outdoor schemes during Covid to increase pedestrianised space. That has taken off a lot of our paid parking away, which is welcome, in terms of increasing safety for pedestrians and vulnerable road users. There is also a proposed one-way in Delgany that will take away some parking or potential paid parking. Our park and ride is a very valuable asset for Greystones and every town south of Greystones to access public transport. So we are not going to be in the same capacity as Bray and other districts to raise capital in that regard. Overall I will support this budget and I do thank Brian for the presentation today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Neary. Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR FORTUNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thank you Brian for the overview of the budget. Just a couple of small point, but can I make an observation before I do? We say we have 128 million of a budget, which is true, but when you actually drill down into it, there is 51.2 million of that is on pay roll and there has been comment made over budgets in recent years that that should come from central government, rather than the local authority, but it puts out the wrong message out that we have the 128 million. We actually have 77 million of which we only have about 7.8 million to discuss, because as Brian said, 90% of it is already done and dusted. There is no discussion on it. Just, not to repeat, but in housing I have a serious concern with the housing repairs. I think the budget, I mean this isn't necessarily Joe and his team's fault, but the budget of 2.1 million to me is very, very tight when you look at the amount of houses that are blocked up. You take the point that Cllr Behan made at the beginning. The reason I made it from my context, I had two very serious, what I

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would call very serious family issues made to me in the last three weeks. And while the housing section in Wicklow does great work and obviously their hands are tied to a certain extent by what goes on nationally, we are not really able to help someone like that. I think that is very sad. I think there should be money made available to make sure all of these houses are brought back into the market. I would totally also agree with what Cllr Timmins said on affordable housing. I think it's disgraceful we are not talking about affordable housing in the budget as well. There seems to be a contradiction and I don't know whose fault this is, but it seems to be a contradiction with the conversations we are having and other meetings I attended on affordable housing and then listening to Minister O'Brien in the media in the last ten days. I don't know what is going on, but it's not constructive and it isn't helping people. The affordable housing situation needs to be upfront because there is equally a demand for affordable housing and social housing and it shouldn't be treated and ignored. Maybe Joe will come back and say he is not ignoring it, he is waiting on info from the department, but then someone, maybe our Government councillors need to start getting more factual straight information from the ministers if they are coming along and spinning yarns to us. But there is a serious issue out there on affordable housing.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Fortune. I am going to bring in Joe to clarify Cllr Timmins's point and then maybe you would take up the rent arrears and the housing repairs again if possible.

JOE: Okay, we will go, sorry, page 13, Edward, I can now see what you are talking about. In the, we have in our schemes going forward we have two to

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three sites in Bray, the Part 8s are done. They will be delivery and that is part of that overhang between the two schemes. We don't have any plans, giving any more land in the short-term to approved housing bodies. The plan will be given to something that Cllr Fortune said.

Like I said at the next meeting will there be a presentation from Housing for All and that will effectively exhaust all the land the local authority will have, there will be a mix of some affordables on the bigger sites and a lot of social. So again we will be talking to you earlier if there is any land development. In the short-term there is no plan to give, bar we have given already to the approved housing bodies. Again I want to reiterate, there has been ads, or we are looking in short-term for the affordables to the private sector who has commission if they are willing to start building affordable to us, we will work with them through the affordable housing fund grants. Again we will be talking about that at the next meeting next week. So I am assuming everyone is happy enough with that?

What were the other two questions? The rents. I think Brian said at the CPG there is a small increase in the rents. In the last year rents are quite difficult to predict. There is a lot of incomes out of people... the rents are income-related, there is the arrears issue, but also there is a lot of adjustments on rents at the moment. There has been in the last couple of weeks, we have been sending out since the [INAUDIBLE]... Covid moratorium, we are issuing sending out letters more aggressively on some of the old arrears cases, but you also have in

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that rent figure, you also have, it's very difficult here for everyone to predict that type of income and the third question, councillor was? Was that to, that was the three of them.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I might bring in Colm, there was a general question on road maintenance, Colm, maybe you might give a quick overview on road maintenance.

COLM: Sorry, Cathaoirleach. In terms of road maintenance works we then to agree each year with each Municipal District the priority areas within the district for road maintenance to be carried out in accordance with the budget allocation. Obviously the road resurfacing programme works on the same basis where roads are prioritised from one year to the next and, our own crew here in the, the centre crew and the non-national roads carry out those works.

So the issue around staffing in Municipal Districts and it's the same for our active travel schemes and our NTA funded schemes a lot of those works are carried out by a central crew here in Wicklow County Council, a non-national roads crew who carry out the work on behalf of the districts in those areas. So that the staff sometimes are, in the Municipal Districts are supplemented with staff from NNR crew, or the works are carried out slowly by the NNR crew. We have been very successful in the last couple of years in seeking funding, additional funding both from TII and from the National Transport Authority both in terms of active travel, but also in climate change adaptation works as well. So whether our issues in terms of roads that are susceptible to funding like severe weather events and also whether there are safety on particular

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roads through improvement grants, we have also been successful in receiving fund as well. So they supplement the revenue works that are being carried out on an annual base as well.

CATHAOIRLEACH: There was one other question from Cllr Neary.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: You mention the biodiversity officer, I know the department of housing will have a competition for ten local authorities to take on a biodiversity officer. We are going to apply for that and I think we will make a successful application for that. Also the Department of Communications and Climate Action have agreed with the CCMA to fund staff fully for the whole climate action area. That will come out early next year. We haven't got exactly what we are getting yet, but there is funding coming through from both of those streams so we will know next year exactly what we are going to get.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gail Dunne.

CLLR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First of all, Cathaoirleach, I am delighted some of the members mentioned affordable housing today. I think Joe has answered the question fairly well, but the fact that they are looking for affordable housing, looking for lands for turnkey development I think is really important, because to be fair there is a lot of people at the moment who don't qualify for social housing and yet cannot buy a house unfortunately. In Wicklow this week a three bedroom semi went for 460. What worries me is about affordable housing the money that is on offer, will people be able to raise it. I hope Joe is successful in acquiring land. Just on the budget, I, for someone who sat through a lot of budgets over the years, I think this is a very positive budget, I think there is increases in all the major areas and a lot of

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work has been done and I just want to thank Brian and his staff for the work they have done and just to say I will be supporting the budget. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Lourda Scott.

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thanks to Brian and all the staff for the budget. I just have a couple of points, they have largely been made by my colleagues but some of them merit repeating. I welcome hearing from the CPG this morning that there will be a review of outdoor staff. That is something that is needed in our own district. I would like a commitment that this review of staff across the MDs will start in January, that there is a committed timeframe for that, because really we have been waiting long enough in Greystones and we need to get a review done and if there is a recruitment process or whatever it needs to progress quite quickly.

I welcome very much the money that has been allocated for climate action. There is money activated for the decarbonisation zone in Arklow, and also money put towards EV charges across the county. Very pleased to see 6,000 or 7,000 being earmarked for the Midwest Energy Bureau. That will be a positive step for Wicklow, being the lead authority in that and add some much-needed staff to the climate action team as well. I had the query that additional personnel had been, will be provided for in the budget in areas of IT planning, housing, sport, emergency services and I had a query as to why the climate action team wasn't included in that, but, Frank, I think you have answered that query that there will be money coming centrally. Again I am aware of the

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funding coming through for the biodiversity officer and I know that Breege has touched base with the Department about that. I welcome that coming through.

Other than that I just have one comment on the roads. Examining the usage of the roads versus lengths or the distance rather, to me it seems a no-brainer that usage and heavy usage as we have. We have development of cars due to the population in the district. Just to me it seems a logical pathway that there should be more money allocated where there is heavy usage and a high population density of people and cars on the roads in a district. I think that is something that we need to be looking at with a wider lens as we go forward next year. But otherwise, thank you, I will be supporting the budget, thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Fitzgerald.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Sorry there. Just I was looking at the housing, am I on there? Yeah.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Go ahead.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Just on page 13 on housing assistance payment and I want to comment the staff for the work they are doing and we have 2,386 people availing of HAP which is all grand to hear that. But the fact is that in Arklow and other areas that I know, that people can't get houses. Unfortunately people then have to up the ante and provide private funding, extra. That is well-known. Last week I was looking, that is what delayed me, I see four people who have been served with notice in houses who are on HAP, but they can't avail of another house because, as in other, I think it's mentioned in

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Greystones and other areas, the rent has gone up. So effectively you serve notice, you do it right and then the person has to leave the house and Wicklow County Council, unless they are way up the housing list can't provide housing for them. It's a bigger problem. Four in the one week is a problem. Previously they have had many more. So really I did speak briefly to the minister when I got the chance, but effectively the rents now are so high in Arklow we cannot rely on the Housing Assistance Payment into the future as we have in the past. 2086 availing of it throughout the county, there is a huge amount of people availing of it, but that won't be happening in the future. With very a bigger problem ahead of us to be quite honest about it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I might bring Joe back in on that point, I think it's the only point on housing in this session.

JOE: I suppose two things. For the next five years we will have the housing delivery which will show a total housing delivery for the next five years of 1,350. That is on top of the 1,256 we have done in the last five years. So I know you talk about 2,000, but we are getting there and people will see a lot of delivery. Arklow is still problematic, because of the lack of infrastructure, the sewerage and that is beginning to start, so we will be planning. At the tail end of the delivery plan we will be bringing in the infrastructure will be available and we will be upping the Arklow delivery. As people know in the short-term we do have Delaney Park this year and the Vale Road is kicking in which is helping. I see your point, but the Housing Delivery Plan we are delivering units an at speed we have never done before. That is all I can answer. As people know once you deliver social housing there is a real kicking in and some of the

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other houses are freed up. So we will be bringing it up again at the next council meeting whenever it is, next week.

CATHAOIRLEACH: There was one question, I might bring Brian in in terms of the roads maintenance in Greystones. I know he has been looking at this. Do you want to come in on that?

BRIAN GLEESON: Just to clarify the whole of the roads allocation isn't done by length of road. It's part of it. Mainly the discretionary element of the local roads provision. Just to point out a few statistics. Greystones Municipal District the road length accounts for 7% but the allocation they got was 12%, so it does take into account condition of the roads and needs. There is improvement schemes that would be specific to individual areas that would be looked at from year-to-year. So it's not exclusively lengths, that is one element of it. That was just the point that was made that we can't just divide a road's allocation by population. It's more nuanced than that. I suppose another point to make is obviously it's not included in the revenue budget, but there is five million allocated of development levies to go towards the Black Lion Chapel Road project works. Also the NTA project measure schemes. Greystones was allocated 1.5 million for projects from that particular scheme. So I think there is a lot of, funding is going into roads in the Greystones area, but it might not necessarily be showing up in the revenue budget, it would be more in the capital budget and I just make one point in relation to repairs and maintenance.

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Just to clarify so people are clear. 2.1 million for repairs and maintenance is specifically for repairs and maintenance, there is near 3.8 million for pre-letting. That is 6 million together. We also have provisions in that area for fabric upgrade and electric upgrade works. There is a central heating provision of 235,000 in the budget, there is provision for conditional survey works of 100,000. We have traveller accommodation, the budget is half a million. So the whole repairs and maintenance to the overall budget is 10.5 million, just to clarify that there is a lot of money going into that area, but, as has been pointed out there is huge demands and just in relation to the rent, it's important to note that Cllr Walsh mentioned about the, some of the arrears were in relation to long-term tenants and long arrears. We were restricted over the course of Covid by direction from the Government that we couldn't initiate any legal action, so there was a lot of long-term arrears that we couldn't take legal action on for a while. Now that is obviously withdrawn now so we will be looking at those particular areas.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. Cllr R O'Connor.

CLLR O'CONNOR: Before I get to my two questions I just want to welcome the increase in climate action funding overall. I think the SPC staff work extremely hard and this money is going to help a lot for big projects such as the decarbonisation of Arklow and the Energy Bureau which is going to be a fantastic project. My two questions for Britain. One how big is the threat is the change of interest rates for loans? Are most of our loans fixed rates? I can see it coming up, that changing and interest rates going higher. Another topic, when do we find out from the department if we will be getting that Covid

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funding, because it's the fine print at the end of the budget saying this will be all good as long as we get this funding from the department. Will we be finding out January 1st or when does it happen?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Last two speakers. Cllr John Snell, followed by Cllr Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR SNELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. First and foremost I just want to say that this is a very fair and balanced budget for the year ahead. Having sat on a corporate policy group over the previous meetings to look into this, I think what has come back from that that there would be no extra costs put on our businesses. The reality is we are still coming through Covid, we are in the middle of a pandemic, unfortunately. I think to keep the rates at what they were was most welcome and I think all members shared that view as well.

This budget has no cuts to frontline services at all. In fact it has increases and such as roads, the roads budget is reserved for the year ahead which is most welcome. In regards to the housing section and the relets, if members stepped back and looked at it, the reality is there is relets because of the success of what is happening in the housing section. When you deliver 400 social houses in a 12-month period and everyone knows that you need a home to meet your needs so in a lot of cases people are upsizing and downsizing. There is not a district in this county that hasn't had good news over the last 12 months and indeed a lot more social houses coming down the line. So the 3.85 million is most welcome and certainly, as the head of finance has said, should there be more funding available there it will be put into the pre-letting repairs and

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maintenance. Yes, 2.1 million over a housing stock that we have of 4,500 thousand units. The reality is it could have been a far worse budget, certainly for the first meeting we held in the Corporate Policy Group where there was a deficit of three million. That has been bridged now.

So I want to say in general affordable housing has been mentioned there. Successive Governments have failed to grasp the nettle of the importance of affordable housing over a 12-month period. But in Wicklow we will be taking it very serious and we will implement affordable housing as quickly as possible through the housing SPC.

To restore the playground maintenance and the library, again it was something missed out on last year because of the constraints of the budget, but Brian and his team have delivered something that could be supported today. I will be supporting the central Government and I want to thank central Government for the work they have done. An awful lot of work has been going on behind the scenes in this budget, in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. So I personally want to thank each and every one of the senior management and the head of finance for delivering a budget that, to me, will deliver for the people of county Wicklow. So I want to thank them, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr John Snell. Councillor Gerry O'Neill?

CLLR SNELL: I want to come in on Brian, he was given a hand of cards. I think that Brian has done well. There are a couple of issues, short ones. Page 13, we

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planned for a facilitated provision of sustaining high quality, social and affordable housing. Again, after that, there is no talk of affordable housing whatsoever. I think we have to seriously look at this. Day in, day out, I'm getting people who are between the two stones [sic] but it should be a priority once and for all. I suggested before, maybe, that with 522 housing agencies in the country, which, I can't understand it at all ... you know, 522 and these directors are paid big, big money but what I can see in our area here, are more housing agency, housing developments, being built within the area, and I have argued before, why, a certain amount of those could not be affordable? I think it could be done fairly quickly. We are in dire need for affordable housing.

It is something, you know, we are waiting on minister, and for people to announce this, that, the other, for a long, long time and going nowhere, so I suggest that this should be seriously look at. I ask how many housing units are estimated for the next 12 months to be built in County Wicklow? It seems we have gone from the County Council system, we are in the housing units and such ... it seems now from our perspective here in West County Wicklow, that nearly every housing development that is going up, is earmarked for housing bodies. So I am concerned and other councillors have expressed concerns the route that we are taking where people from here on in only rent their housing and you have a 25-year lease from here on in and in 25 years' time, it is looked at again. So it is not, it is far from satisfactory, in my book.

Again, can I just mention another issue on the Budget there, we have that on twinning. To ask you, how come in West County Wicklow here we only have

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3,000, compared to other areas with 6 ... and Bray with a greater amount all together. Here we have a twinning project going back a couple of years, but you know, it is why we are only getting an allocation of 3,000, it is something that I would like to ask the, to ask Brian.

So, again, I would like to thank Brian, I understand the time that has gone in, I never supported Budgets before but I really appreciate the work that has gone in by Brian and the team and in these difficult times. I will be supporting the Budget this year. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Brian, I may bring you in, a couple of questions from Councillor O'Connor and from Councillor O'Neill?

BRIAN: The housing allocation is 3,000 per twinning. It is not an official twinning that took place but which did acknowledge that relationship. To provide the same amount as would a normal twinning. Like the ones with 6,000, County Wicklow, Greystones, Arklow has to twinings with separate towns so the reason why they have 6,000. Bray has 10,000, they have two or three twinings as well. One of them is in California so, there is a slightly higher allocation due to the distance.

So, that is the reason there.

I suppose that Cllr Peir Leonard mentioned the affordable housing, and it is a hot topic and a hugely important issue but in fairness to Director Lane and the reason it is not referenced, it is a capital scheme and we are a part of the

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capital plan. It is a hugely important initiative, it is not a part of the revenue Budget so. There would have been little reference to it in the report.

Regarding Councillor O'Connor, the interest loans, we secure them with the Housing Finance Allegation, usually at a fixed rate so for example the 8 million referred to for the loan for the LED replacement programme, it is at a fixed rate and we get competitive rates from the HFA, so the main concern in relation to loans will be where we have interest only loans that after a while have to convert to full repayment loans. Obviously, the idea would be that we build land and then we can regroup the money fund from the department and redeem the loans, so that is our financial concern in relation to the loan's element.

In relation to yes, the supplementary funding for the COVID. Preliminary there is a supplementary implement for all defendants with regards to the extra money which is secured and going through a process of the Select Committees and then brought and voted on, so early December they are talking about that. There is a figure of 61 million across the local authorities muted in response to the compensation for the COVID funding.

What we have been told is that at the moment we have about, I think over 900,000 on loss of income in relation to parking and planning licenses, and all of that. And then there is the COVID expenditure of over 400,000. The indications are that they are to look only at the losses of income element, so we have to take a hit on the COVID part but maybe we get 88% on the losses of income. But it will be early December to get official word in relation to that.

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. That concludes our discussion on housing and roads. What say to the members you need clarifications on the question, contact the relevant Directors, I think that is the best thing to say at this point. We are moving on to the next phase, it is water services.

Water services, planning, development, management and environmental services. If there are questions on these areas, please feel free to come forward. Cllr Peir Leonard?

CLLR LEONARD: I would like to thank everybody for all the hard work on this. I can't imagine the work that goes into creating something like this, the Budget, and overall, to give support. I have a few questions, and clarification on some of the issues. One has been in relation to the proposed cost of protection works that there seems to be zero Budget in it for the next year. Is that because of external funding coming in for works? And if so, where does that cover? Is that stopping short of Arklow and [distortion of sound], is it to do with the Irish coastal protection works and the arts funding. And I welcome the money retained for the Mermaid Centre up in Bray but as I mentioned before, there is a huge cohort of southern County Wicklow where we need funding here, we need to see it on the grouped. Last year we saw improvements on the events being brought down, I wanted to thank Mike Nicholls for that and we noted it down here, it has been received well, we would like more of that going forward, for it to be distributed throughout the county evenly. In relation to the dredges, the 70,000 for Arklow and Wicklow harbour to clarify if it is in

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addition to the OPD dredging works and the plans to dredge the harbour, it is in addition and where is it for within the river basin? Councillor Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: I saw a story in the Irish Independent, providing information which had been received by Labour Senator, Rebecca Maughniham [sic] with the lack of success of the local authorities in getting the money that is owed to them under the Vacant Sites Levy. I would like the Chief Executive to comment on the sentence in the story that says: County Wicklow is owed more than 550,000 euros in vacant site levies? And we collected absolutely nothing under that heading last year.

Why is that, surely, half a million extra in covers would do a lot. It may avert an increase in the property tax, even. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Gerry Walsh.

CLLR WALSH: Just under the economic development motion, I think it is what we are dealing with. [distortion of sound] in relation to the County Wicklow/Greystones project, there is a requirement to carry out an assessment report and with objection to fundings to clarify I believe that the TII have taken over the governance of funding in association. So, clarification, I heard we are going to advance this project, and maybe to access this much-needed funding to obviously get this assessment report carried out, thank you.

[distortion of sound]

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will bring in Councillor Breege Kilkenny in terms of the vacant site levies, if you are there.

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CLLR KILKENNY: Thank you very much. I will deal with that issue account straight away. Yes, there was recently reports on the levies focused on the money where it is outstanding within Wicklow County Council. However the register was assessed and looked at, you can see that the significant work that data council has taken in identifying the sites and to pursue the levies over the last number of years. In 2019 and 2021 alone 180,000 was collected. 2020 was the start of the COVID pandemic and the priority during the period of national crisis, I should remind everybody, was given to ensuring that there was a continuation of the delivery of essential services to the citizens. But also, to given cognisance to the many financial difficulties experienced by the public at the time. So in addition to this, due to the pandemic, there was also a backlog of court hearings inhibiting the prosecution for non-payment of the levies. So the council continues to liaise with the landowners where the levels are outstanding and when it values the financial difficulties, that are occurring we offer a phased payment to assist with regard. So in relation to the current year, a further seven cases are being prepared for legal action successful during the year could realise a further collection of 188,000.

I would also just to go over the details with regards to the vacant site levy that falls under the Urban Regeneration of Housing Acts 2015, it is a vacant site when defined by any land in excess of 0.05 hectares and to demonstrate a need for housing in the area and that the site is suitable for the housing of the majority of the site idle. In addition, where there is a case of regeneration of land, the majority of the site is not used in an extended period of time. So in

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respect of the council powers with respect to the dereliction and vacancy, the council utilises all powers available. But there are limitations to the situations available with the many exceptions also available. So, just to reiterate, those media reports that gave the reflection that money is not collected by County Wicklow. Out of the three years with the site levy coming into force, there was only one year where it was not collected, it was the year at the start of the pandemic, 2020. Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach.

>>: The information in the report was give been I the minister, Peter Bourke, a department saying to a Senator that Wicklow County Council failed to collect 550,000 Euros ... we all know about all of the difficulties as has been outlined by the Director. But is she saying that it is not right, that the Manchester is wrong in his statement to that Senator, then? That he gave the wrong information, 550,000 not collected? Thank you.

CLLR KILKENNY: Not at all, the information with regards to the 550,000 is correct but the incorrection was that the department does not collect the levies, that the amount has been built up over the years and it is where landowners come in with their financial difficulties and we offer the phase payment so the money is still due but it is phase over time so we don't collect the full amount within the one year. Does that make sense?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Moving on.

I may bring in the Chief Executive in terms of the funding and the state of play with the Greenway from County Wicklow to Greystones. Frank?

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE: We did a visibility on that but it may be specialist because of the area of conservation it is expensive. In order to progress we must do a full environmental impact report.

So the cost of that is something around 600 to 800,000, that ball park. That report will tell us if we have a feasible scheme. So as we are doing the environmental impact assessment report, you have to figure out can we complete a scheme going through a special area of conservation? That is paramount. As has been said, it has transferred to TII, we have put in a Budget for TII and application to funding to do the EIAR we are in contact with them, it is easier to deal with the TII as we have regular interaction, it is in the funding application for the EIAR, so it will tell us if we have a viable scheme or not.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian with regards to the dredging allocation and the coastal protection?

BRIAN: That 70,000 is in addition to the 100,000, included in the capital ref transfer that goes to a fund for dredging and future capital works. In Arklow an element is the fishermen's huts to be liked at. There are 100,000 in total that have been put into a fund year on year to Arklow and to County Wicklow, separately.

In relation to, I think Cllr Peir Leonard, mentioning about the arts as well. And last year, this year, should I say, we received a number of one-off pieces of funding.

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That could be setting up specific art festivals and activities, so, hopefully we will get the additional funding again next year.

I think that was it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, thank you. Moving on to Cllr Edward Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Thank you, two things.

Firstly, the reference to money allocated a couple years ago for new fire stations in Baltinglass and Dunraven, when is it envisioning that the works begin on the two projects? Secondly, there is 20,000 here for electric charge points around the County, what does it mean in practice? How many charge points does it result in or where they may be located? There are not any in the west of the council at the moment.

CLLR FORTUNE: Brian you mentioned vacant sites and 60% to explain if it were increased up to 80% it would have implication for the Budgeting. I misunderstood, can you explain that again, please if you don't mind?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Bourke.

CLLR BOURKE: Does the management wish to make progress with Greenway. You mentioned it earlier, I would like update on the progress that you expect to make on that. Secondly, I remember the last, I think it was 20 years ago, we have this building that the council own it, it is the old VEC building in Rastrum [sic] it was mentioned to do something with that, that was 20 years ago, it is maybe derelict or a vacant site maybe we should charge ourselves a vacant site

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levy? Can you comment on the building, what we are going to do with it? I get people asking me regularly, why can't we do something with it. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I will bring in Brian, to answer those questions. For Councillor Fortune and Cllr Edward Timmins.

BRIAN: In relation to vacancy leaf, the easiest way to explain it, e we have properties worth 1.8 million considered vacant. Up to a couple of years ago we would give 100% vacancy relief on that cost, it would be the full 1.8. Changed it to 60% so the cost in the Budget is 60% of the 178, about 1.1 million. If we increased it to 80% relief, the costs go up to 1.4 million. So it will be an additional 300,000, so we would have to find that in the budget to cut services elsewhere. Does that explain that? That is for Tom Fortune. In relation to the fire station. It is a capital project. I may ask Director Laverty and Director Kilkenny to come in on the charging points question.

Colm?

CLLR LAVERY: The fire stations we have formerly approved the two stations in the procurement process to appoint the designers for the two stations. We have gone jointly for a design for the two stations together to hopefully speed up the process. So, we would hope to have a design team on early in the New Year. That we will have a detailed design completed in 6 months and then move to procure the contractor for construction. So, hopefully have construction, hopefully started, towards the end of next year, early 2023.

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In terms of, when I have the floor, to talk to the Greenway, the intention is, to lodge the planning documents and the EIS, [distortion of sound] in the first quarter next year, obviously, the route has been identified, the issue of how to procure that land it is by a licensed arrangement or CPO is yet to be decided and we are consulting with TII, in relation to that, who have taken over the responsibility for Greenways, and the intention is to hopefully have planning and land access in place by the start of 2023 for construction to start. And then envisioning an 18-to-24-month construction project.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Breege Kilkenny please come back in to speak to coastal protection and Cllr Edward Timmins on the EV charging.

CLLR KILKENNY: To the coastal protection, there is a small amount of co-funding for the minor works but the most of it comes from the OPW. But we have put in 50,000 to the capital code to deal with it, it is more of a capital issue. In terms of the EV charge points. Just to say, as following the work that we did last year, there is to be an EV charge point strategy prepared for the county. Then we put in the provision in the Budget for this year just to kick-start that. So, in essence there will be discussions with the, let's say the fleet operator as well as the district engineers in relation to charge points. Initially, we probably concentrate on the council's fleet in terms of EV charge points. Does that answer the question?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, thank you. Cllr Edward Timmins, are you OK with that? Yes. OK. Sorry, there was another question from Councillor Bourke in terms of the building, frank? Chief Executive Chief Executive so, hold tough, we have a

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good application in my view ready to go, hopefully we will get funding for that.
Councillor Dunne.

CLLRS DUNNE: For somebody at the forefront of town team meetings there is anger that maybe not enough is being done. I accept it is not for the situation from the council, I know how hard you are working and I know they definitely feel let down by senior minister, but I think it is a project for the whole area between County Wicklow and Greystones to promote the area, and we have seen the Waterford Greenway, what it has done for the area. They are long-term project but maybe, that things could be moved on. I wonder, Chief Executive, when you hope to have a word on funding for the project. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Mary Kavanagh.

CLLR KAVANAGH: Sorry, I'm trying to find the mute button on this thing. I have two inquiries. One is in connection with the coastal erosion committee that has been set up in order to draw down funds for that really important restoration work because I know that the Greenway it cannot proceed until we have it copper fastened, that coastal erosion will not detract from the Greenway. So, I know, a couple of meetings ago, the Chair indicated that a committee was being put together. I want to know how long does it take to put a committee together? And when will it start to be operational? To start applying for this huge EU reforming that is required. And then the second quick query is in connection with Glendalough we talked about World Heritage sites and the importance of a master plan for Glendalough is there a plan to apply to

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UNESCO to have it marked as a World Heritage Site? The reason I ask is that the amount of income that it would generate from people who would travel. These UNESCO sites are very important. They are of a universal cultural and environmental importance. And people do travel all over the world to see these. I mean it takes a while to become one, it just does not happen. UNESCO must make the decision about whether or not to include it. But I think there is a huge uniqueness about Glendalough, dating from the 16th century, preserved it takes all the box, is there to be a concerted effort to trying to get World Heritage status for Glendalough.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Before I hand over to the Chief Executive on that one, Cllr Leonard, your hand is raised are you okay? Have you got clarification on your questions? You are okay. Frank, I might get you to come in on the Glendalough question.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: On the Glendalough one we are on the Department's list for applying for UNESCO status. We will try and put it on the agenda for next Monday if we can in terms of the master plan and stuff and a full discussion on the Glendalough.

On the coastal erosion, presumably you are talking about a steering group at national level. That is in place, they are working on the preliminary report that is in place and bringing that forward through the full EIAR process. That is really important. I still think we can work away on the greenway in parallel to the coastal erosion work. I think that would be important that it doesn't hold

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things up. The National Steering Group is in place, it's huge funding over a number of different counties so that that group is in place and has the various different agencies on it. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Members, we have reached 1.00pm, are you happy to take a break for 20 minutes or half an hour? Is that all right? If we said 1.30? Okay. See you all at 1.30. Thank you.

[LUNCH BREAK]

THE MEETING RESUMED AFTER THE LUNCH BREAK AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, members, welcome back. I am just going to hand you over to Helen just do a quick roll call.

[ROLL CALL TAKEN]

ADMINISTRATOR: We still have a quorum.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Gerry Walsh is there anyway. Okay, thanks, members. Just before we move on to the next session, Cllr Leonard your hand is raised.

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CLLR LEONARD: Sorry, earlier I was on mute and I didn't realise you didn't hear me. I just wanted to clarify really the coastal protection works. Because there is zero allocated in the budget, I know the OPW are funding the Flood Relief Scheme. That is a climate stream of funding, but it's the coastal protection works because the Irish Rail plan stops short at Brittas Bay down towards Arklow and Clogga beach. I know if funding is allocated, even to start the ball rolling on some coastal protection for our beaches. We are losing our beaches at a rate of knots. Soon we will have no beaches. Clogga beach is gone, I just want to ensure there is funding allocated there. I would propose that if there is not that part of the capital project match funding is reallocated towards the protection of our coastal regions, in particular those beaches that won't be covered by the Irish Rail funding.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Breege, can I bring you in to answer that?

BREEGE: Certainly. Thank you very much for your question. Basically in terms of the coastal protection works this is in relation to the coastal protection south of any of the works that OPW are doing, Cllr Leonard. There is CCMA working group looking particularly at coastal protection. One of our officers, Mark Deveraux has been asked to be a part of that Steering Group to deal with this issue. As you know we will be sourcing funding through the climate action fund in addition with regard to those works. On top of that we have put 50,000 into the capital code, because any works coming out of that will be capital code funding. Then, as you know, Mark as well is working with the groups down there, particularly in the Arklow area in terms of, let's say more of the

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nature-based coastal protection projects that we are trying to get off the ground, which indeed has been led by yourself.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you. Cllr Grace McManus, did you want to come in.

CLLR McMANUS: Yes, before we come off this section I have a question about the fire service. We saw over the weekend there has been another application for a strategic housing development in Bray. I think it's five or six stories and I imagine we will see more of them as that legislation is phase out. I am wondering is there money in the short-term in the budget to support the fire service to respond to that maybe unpredicted need?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Brian, I might bring you in on that one?

BRIAN GLEESON: Well the fire operations has increased by approximately 100,000 year on year on the budget. So it's addressing the, I suppose the staffing pay roll costs that are there and it covers any vacancies that will be filled during the year, so there is a full complement of staff has been budgeted for in relation to the fire services across the whole county, not just Bray.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you, all right, we are going to move on to the next section, it's recreation and amenities, agricultural health and safety and miscellaneous. So just raise your hand if you indicate there you want to speak on any of these issues.

I am sure Michael Nicholson will be delighted to take your questions on recreation.

MICHAEL: Can't wait.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr John Mullen.

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CLLR MULLEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach and thank you to everyone for the preparation of the budget, particularly in these times when it's so difficult to do anything really. While I am supporting today's budget, I just want to raise something I have seen. I am delighted that the Mermaid Centre has been funded for 325,000, that is fantastic for there. My understanding is that we would fund and own two arts centres in the region. For one arts centre to be getting 13 times the budget of another is something we really have to look at in the following years. I just want to raise that today, but, like I say, I understand that there are circumstances for that and I know Michael and his team are working on that. But we have, just more reflective of the divide between the urban and rural areas. The other art centres, being Tinahely, has a large rural catchment area, it is owned by Wicklow County Council, it does a lot of strategic work and very important work and I just hope in the years ahead we can resolve the funding imbalance, thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. There is no one else indicating at the moment. Michael do you want to give us a view on Cllr Mullen's situation in Tinahely?

MICHAEL: The answer is very simple, Cathaoirleach. We get a request from Tinahely every year and we pay what they ask for. We get a request from Mermaid Centre every year and we pay them what they ask for. You can't really compare Mermaid Centre with the Tinahely Arts. I mean it's chalk and cheese. What they ask for they get. We meet them generally every January and they make a pitch and in the last three years what they have asked for we gave them. So I mean we are looking at the possibility of the building, I know, Cllr Mullen is aware of that, because we rent that building to them and we in

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turn rent the building off them in the Market Square for the library and we are looking at the possibility of transferring each building to each other group. We are looking at that and John is aware of. That apart from that for funding what they are looking for we give them, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry Walsh. Can you hear us? Okay, I will come back to you, Gerry. Cllr Peir Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: Just on the same note, I just want to congratulate Michael who does fantastic up there. Maybe instead of taking anyone's budget away we could look at creating revenue for these places to make them more sustainable in nature going forward. I am hoping to get some kind of an arts centre in Arklow off the ground here, but I would like for it to be sustainable and not to be eating into money in Wicklow County Council. That they could, once they get seed funding initially it will sustain itself. That is what we need to head towards with a lot of these art centres.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Walsh are you there.

CLLR WALSH: Yes. I had a problem with the audio. Just two quick points in relation to the outdoor recreation, I am going to ask Michael in relation to the audit which has been carried out in the Greystones area on recreational needs across the district. Number two just on a point of correction actually on the, I think it's page 48 under miscellaneous, the Joint Policing Committee does state that one public meeting was held in November 21. We had to cancel that meeting, as you know, Cathaoirleach, there, just for two days prior to the date on the 21st to obviously guidance at the time, official guidance at the time. So just to correct that, thank you.

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Michael, I will bring you back in.

MICHAEL: In relation to arts centres, obviously we would love to have them all over the county. But they are very difficult to run and to make money.

Mermaid Centre is located in Bray with one-and-a-half million on its door step and it can only survive with a significant contribution from the council. You can see why Arts Centres around the country are struggling and the fact they have been closed for the last two years doesn't help. I agree with Cllr Leonard, ideally if they could wash their own faces and break even, but it's very costly to host these artists and to get top quality gigs in each of these and they are very expensive. The audit for Greystones, yes, Gerry, you are correct, we have the first draft of that audit, we are just going through it at the moment and we hope to be in a position to circulate it, it's just not quite polished yet and there is publish consultation to go through.

While I have the floor, Cathaoirleach, if you don't mind, since the meeting started this morning at 11.00am, we did get announcement of the ARAS measures 2 and 3. We have done well we have got over 900,000. We have got money to improve the access bridge for 162,000. We have the Cliff Walk Protection Scheme to reroute to Greystones, that is almost 200,000. We have 450,000 to create a walk on the Sugar Loaf Way. And we have another 45,000 for the development of a Tree Trout Route in Greystones. Two of the projects are in Greystones, one in Rathdrum and one in... [INAUDIBLE]...

CATHAOIRLEACH: Very welcome. Okay, I don't have anyone else indicating at the moment. I just have a couple of questions before we move on for Brian.

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Page 75, Brian. It's Section C0503. It's grants for waste water group schemes. It's just if you could give me an idea of the figures here, it's the estimated Chief Executive figure is 60,000 and the adopted by the council is 616,000. There is quite a difference there if you could give us a view on that?

MICHAEL: Okay, money has been moved into the capital fund in relation to... sorry, just get my papers here. It's the DPI scheme that was set up, I will just get it on the spreadsheet here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, take your time. I am certainly putting you on-the-spot here.

MICHAEL: The DPI water resolution programme, last year 16,000 made available for it in the capital budget, but as you can see the estimated out turn was only 157 thousand. That was moved to the capital fund, because it's a programme that will be over a few years, so now that 60,000 is kind of the contribution from the revenue account that will be transferred into the capital fund. So the bulk of that money, it's not so much a cut, it's just the bulk of it has been moved into the capital account.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Just before we move on, I just want, I suppose in terms of the recreation and amenities, I just wanted to take this opportunity to say look in terms of Michael's department and what has been achieved in the last 12 months, even just without that announcement today which is obviously a further huge development and almost a million euro in outdoor recreational, but it's the amount of work which has been done by the staff there and bringing funding into the county.

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I suppose at the outset when I took on the Cathaoirleach's role, I said one of the main things for me was to continue to get as much funding into the county as possible and I think we are doing that in all aspects of the council, but particularly in Michael's department, with regards to facilities and amenities and our county is thriving in the fact that we are moving forward. I just want to pass that on to Michael and his staff and indeed all sections of the council, but well done and continue the good work going forward.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Moving on, I think we have had a good discussion on all areas of the budget. I want to thank the members in particular for all their contributions right across all the different divisions. I think we want to move on now, at this stage we have three votes to take. The first vote is on the adoption of the vacancy rate of valuation for 2022, the commercial rates valuation. It's to just so that members are aware, 2021, the rates was set at 0.217. It's the intention to leave it at the same rate for 2022. So I want a proposer and seconder for that, please.

CLLR WINTERS: I will propose that...

CATHAOIRLEACH: One second I will bring Brian in. Sorry the ARV rate. 0.217ARV rate. So a proposer and seconder please? Proposed by Cllr winters and seconded by Cllr Dunne.

ADMINISTRATOR: Shall I take the vote? It's to adopt the annual rate of valuation for 2022. So retain the annual rate of valuation set at 0.217 for 2022.

[VOTE TAKEN]

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ADMINISTRATOR: 25 in favour and five not present.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you. Moving on to item number two to adopt a vacancy rate for County Wicklow. Brian, I might bring you in before we look to proposals.

BRIAN GLEESON: As you have said, the proposal is to keep the vacancy relief rate at 60% for the coming year. So there is no change on the situation in 2021. So that is the proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, could you I have a proposer, Cllr Fitzgerald?

CLLR FITZGERALD: I will propose it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Bourke seconded. No other proposals? We will go to a vote.

ADMINISTRATOR: Okay, so it's to adopt a vacancy rate for County Wicklow. To retain the 60% commercial rates relief percentage on vacant premises for 2022.

[VOTE TAKEN]

ADMINISTRATOR: Again we have 27 in favour and five not present.

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, finally... if I could just go on and look for proposals for the adoption of the Annual Budget for 2022. Before I do, Brian, do you want to come back in? Or are you happy?

BRIAN GLEESON: No, thank you, I think we have covered everything. It's a very favourable budget, seeing an increase of over nine million and increasing housing, roads, climate action and environmental protection, so I think overall, given the circumstances, it's an extremely positive budget. We hope to get the support from the members today. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. I am looking for proposals for the adoption of the Annual Budget. Proposed by Cllr Fitzgerald, seconded by? Second by Cllr O'Brien. Any other proposals? We will go to a vote.

ADMINISTRATOR: To adopt the Statutory Annual Budget for 2022.

[VOTE TAKEN]

ADMINISTRATOR: I will ring Cllr Doyle now, if you will bear with me one second please.

Hi, Cllr Doyle, it's Helen Purcell here. We are just doing the vote at the moment to adopt the Statutory Annual Budget for 2022. Are you in favour? I am going to call your name and ask you whether you are for or against. Cllr Erika Doyle.

CLLR DOYLE: For.

ADMINISTRATOR: Thank you.

27 in favour three against and two not present.

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CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay, thank you, Helen. I suppose that just leaves me to conclude our meeting in terms of the budget. I want to thank, first of all, the members for their interest and involvement in the last number of weeks. In particular the CPG. I think, as Brian has outlined, I think it's a very fair and balanced budget. As I said myself at the very outset, we would all probably like a little bit more, but look we have what we have and we make the best of it. I want to thank in particular Brian for his dedication and weeks of work that has gone into this in presenting this budget today. He has done a magnificent job in terms of what he has put into it and I want to recognise that. I want to thank Frank, unfortunately it's his last budget meeting with us in Wicklow. But I want to thank him for his contribution and indeed the entire management team in Wicklow County Council. Again, I suppose each director would like a lot more in their area, but we all have to live with what we have. I just want to acknowledge their contribution in what they have put forward. So I appreciate that.

So that concludes our budget part of the meeting. We do have a suspension of standing orders by Cllr Joe Behan, so we will move on to that now. Joe, if you want to come in and give your update?

CLLR BEHAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach for Chairing a great meeting. Just in relation to the suspension of standing orders, all of us probably have become aware of over the weekend, an announcement was made that a Dublin-based

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club [inaudible] merged with Bray Wanderers, a County Wicklow-based club. While it would not really interest us but we are certainly most definitely involved in the grounds on which Bray Wanderers play their home matches. It is an iconic football ground, used over 100 years for playing football in Bray and Wicklow County Council. I am deeply concerned about the possibility of a Dublin-based club coming in to use a scarce Wicklow County Council and Bray sporting facility. The statement issued over the weekend mentioned there was a majority stake in the Bray Wanderers' purchase. It did not specify if it was bought by [inaudible] or bought by somebody else? So I would like to nail colours to the mast to say that I am completely, utterly opposed to Dublin teams coming in to use County Wicklow facilities. They have a huge amount of facilities on their doorstep, they do not and should not be utilising our facilities in Wicklow County Council. What I want to ask, Cathaoirleach, is that we seek immediate clarification as Wicklow County Council from the board of Bray Wanderers, they are with the sport, it is now with Wicklow County Council with the landlord to get the clarification on who exactly or what exactly is the new entity to be? And simultaneously and it may be happening, if it is, I am glad to hear the result, that we seek legal advice on our legal position regarding the possible merger and the possible impact on the grounds. Thank you for letting me speak.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Joe Behan. Dermot O'Brien?

CLLR O'BRIEN: I fully support him in what he said. For me, there is are two factors here, that I don't see or I have not heard in terms of the conversation

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and the inclusion in the conversation with the local authority about this merger, this takeover or whatever it may turn out to be. We have a stake, we are stakeholder in this, we are told another terms of our vision in football in Wicklow County Council, so I would be concern fundamental the council were not involved in the conversation. And similarly concerned, it is obvious, the fan, the core, the heartbeat of the club have not been involved in the conversations, they are left scratching heads and wondering if their club, as has been said with over 100 years of support, it is embedded into the DNA of the town and the County, if it is raised in a heartbeat in the boardroom so keen for the council to play a role and to support the fans in the conversation.

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

CLLR O'BRIEN: As a former President to the referees [inaudible], and the League of Ireland, I want to echo concerns as well. But to order a little caution within the rhetoric and language. As someone that know there is are lots of kids from Bray Wanderers play with South Dublin. Bray Wanderers were formed in 1922, and [inaudible] in 1967. It is a merger, by reports, not a takeover. So I urge caution. The League of Ireland are on their knees, we don't have to play legal debate within sport. I want to see the Bray Wanders doing well, if this is the way to do it, to do so but I don't want politics brought into the sport, it is not a place for it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Anne Ferris?

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CLLR FERRIS: A quick point, Cathaoirleach, the members of the Bray Municipal District were advised by the administration on Friday, that the whole issue regarding this has been sent to the law agent for advice.

I would suggest that we wait until we get the advice from the law agent as to this before we, you know, even discuss it further. I think without having that legal advice, we are talking in the dark here. I have been a great supporter of Bray Wanderers and when I was working within the Chair of the Town Council, I signed the sporting lease at that time. So, I have always supported them. But I really think that speculation is not good. It is dangerous and we should wait until we get the law agent. And all of the information was received from the administrator on Friday.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry O'Neil? Can you hear news.

CLLR O'NEIL: Sorry, we are behind in the West here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will wait for you!

CLLR O'NEIL: ... I know that as a member of the IABA in County Wicklow and the clubs around, and there are a few clubs without premises, I was wandering if there is update on that. And also to say, that the Councillor is entitled to ask questions on the merge, and a bit rich for Councillor Paul O'Brien to be lecturing other Councillors, the genuine concerns are there. They are entitled to their questions and entitled to be, to ask these questions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK.

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CLLR O'BRIEN: Sorry but there have been occasions when... Cllr Gerry O'Neil attacks me. I am entitled to speak up. All I did was to urge caution. Cllr Gerry O'Neil should not put his own spin on it as usual. Enough said.

CATHAOIRLEACH: OK. Councillors, I have heard both of you.

CLLR O'NEIL: ... (overlapping conversation).

CATHAOIRLEACH: I have heard both, so please let's move on. I will bring in Frank in terms of the update of the situation.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: This is new to us, we will get the legal advice to make the contact with the Bray wanderers, that is all that I can say.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No involvement of the council within the discussion?

CHIEF EXECUTIVE: No, and Bray Wanderers will have to contact us in the event of an amalgamation. But we will get the law agent report first.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Joe Behan? One second, one second. Cllr Joe Behan are you happy with that?

CLLR BEHAN: Yes, thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will keep that as part of the discussions going forward. OK, I will bring in Lorraine in terms of the Boxing Club in Bray to give a quick update. Is that what Cllr Gerry O'Neil ... is talking to?

CLLR O'NEIL: It is, please, if I can.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do we have Lorraine Gallagher?

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LORRAINE GALLAGHER: I can contact Cllr Gerry O'Neil to look at the feel.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Gerry O'Neil we will come back to you on that.

CLLR O'NEIL: Thank you. Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Tom Fortune?

CLLR FORTUNE: A quick comment, Frank has dealt with what I wanted to say. I got the impression, and someone phoned me about it yesterday. The timing on this is very important. So, to make sure that if I get legal advice it does not get dragged out. But what Frank is saying is that nothing can happen unless Wicklow County Council put their blessing on it. And as a general comment, Bray Wanderers has been associated with County Wicklow for decades and decades, when I was a kid myself I played with them. So it is a real feature of the County. It is natural that Councillors will have an interest. It is doubly natural that Councillors in Bray have an interest. It is a landmark in Bray, it is very important it is protected.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I certainly think that we will keep members updated on the situation as it develops. Members, thank you very much for your involvement and attention today. It has been a long enough meeting but I think it has been a successful meeting. Thank you again. We will see you next week for our December meeting.

Thank you.

[All speak at once]



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Thank you.

DRAFT