DRAFT BUDGET MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN

AND VIA TEAMS

ON MONDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 10:00AM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED ON MONDAY, 25th NOVEMBER 2025 AT 10:04AM, AS FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good morning, members. I want to welcome you all here this morning for our budget meeting 2025 and thank you all for being here on a busy week and early morning. No pressure, by the way, but I believe Kildare County Council got their budget passed within 26 minutes, but we will see what happens.

I will ask Helen to do a roll call there, please.

MS PURCELL: I would like to thank everybody for joining us, ask the members to keep their cameras on, those who are remote, and the members of the public and the staff if they would keep their cameras and microphones off, please.

We will now go for roll call. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Here.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Mark Barry?

COUNCILLOR MARK BARRY: Here.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Joe Behan? Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

Councillor Erika Doyle will be a little late. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Malachaí Duddy? Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Orla Finn?

Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy?

COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Tom Fortune?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?
Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Miriam Murphy? Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Dermot O'Brien? Councillor Paul O'Brien?
CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gerry O'Neill?
Councillor Warren O'Toole? Councillor Graham Richmond? Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Here.
MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes?
COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Edward Timmins?
And Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Present.
MS PURCELL: Present. We do have a quorum. Thank you. Councillor Alvey, present.
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Present.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Has anyone any condolences? No. Okay. Can I just, I notice someone online there that I want to welcome back, Councillor Gail Dunne. I am sure you will all join me in welcoming Gail back, we know he has been through the mill. I think you said you wanted to say a few words, did you?
COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Yes, I just want to thank all of the members and all of the staff for all their good wishes and cards, and I have been (inaudible) for over a

month. I have still a good bit to go, but, listen, hopefully things are going the right way. I just really appreciate all your thoughts and prayers towards me. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. And, as I say, it is great to see you back.

Okay, we will move on to the agenda, or the agendum because there's only one item. And it is to consider and adopt Wicklow Council draft annual budget from the financial year ended the 31st December 2025 in accordance with section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, the Local Government Financial and Audit Procedures (Regulations) 2014 and the Local Government Financial and Audit (Procedures) (Amendment) Regulations. And we have all got the report, so I will hand you over to our Finance Director, Brian Gleeson now. Thank you.
MR GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and good morning, members. I will try and fly through these slides now and try and beat 26 minutes of Kildare, so bear with me.

Just to summarise the areas that we will be discussing this morning. I will outline the budgetary process, and the budget meeting decisions that need to be taken here today. We will look at the proposal for commercial rates, the ARV, and the commercial rates vacancy relief proposed. I'll detail the planned expenditure and income for next year and review the budgetary challenges that we're facing and look at the expenditure and income adjustments that are being made to the budget next year in comparison to the 2024 budget. I will then undertake a budget review by service division and finish off hopefully with the adoption of the budget.

So to start off, the 2025 budget, as you're aware at this stage, the first stage was the Local Property Tax back in October where the members made a decision to retain the variation rate at plus 6%. The second stage involved the draft budgetary plans with the general municipal allocations, and I attended all the MD meetings during the prescribed period of the 14th October to the 15th November, where all the GMAs were approved by the district members. The third stage is here today, the adoption of the statutory annual budget. And then the final stage of the process is the schedule of municipal district works, and that takes place in quarter 1 of 2025 when we get the

roads allocations from DTAS and TII and the roads have their full scheme in place at that stage.

Just to briefly outline the Local Property Tax decision. In 2025 we got a gross allocation of 20.9 million. That represented an increase of 1.1 million due to new properties being added to the list, and increased valuations. The net provision, I won't go through all the deductions that we went through on the day in October, but the net provision all after the deductions comes to 17.2 million, and that's an increase of approximately 300,000 on last year. As I said already, the decision taken by the members back in October was to retain the variation rate at 6% which generated 1.3 million of income. And as before, a hundred percent of this income has been ring-fenced for discretionary funding within the Municipal Districts: Bray gets 314,200, and the remaining four MDs each get 235,650.

The municipal district expenditure, the discretionary expenditure I suppose is one element of the general municipal allocation which was put forward to the members during October and November of this year. Other areas that we look at and provide funding for is town twinning, 34,000; economic development and promotion, 65,500; festivals, which will include provision of Christmas lights, 142,000; civic receptions, 10,000; and the discretionary funding of 1.3 million. That gives a total of 1.57 million for the general municipal allocation, which was already approved.

So just to move on. The key decisions that we need to take today. First, is agreeing the annual rate of valuation, the ARV, for our commercial rates next year; agree the rates abatement rate on the vacant premises; and then finally, adopt the budget for 2025.

Just to discuss the situation in relation to commercial rates. The total income that's estimated for next year from our commercial rates is 32.5 million, and that's an increase of 1.4 million on last year, which is quite substantial and very welcome. Just to explain how we got to that point. Last year we had just over 31 million. Valuation Tribunal appeals, we lost 81,000. There was five global re-evaluations, that's large utility companies. Five global re-evaluations took place last year, including recent ones in respect of ESB and Uisce Eireann, which I highlighted

already in the Local Property Tax meeting, which brought in substantial money. So we increased our income by about 800,000 in that regard.

Other new builds that were brought in during the year came to just over 850,000. And then, just due to delisting of old properties and downward revisions we had a reduction of 170,000. So that brought us to the 32.5 million. This amount also includes a capital transfer of 300,000 that we transfer into the capital account for a provision of future losses on appeals to the Valuation Tribunal. We still have a number of appeals that have to be heard by the Valuation Tribunal so we have to build up a pot of money in order to pay out if there's -- as is the case in most of the appeals there's a reduction, so we have to make a payment in relation to that. I would, however, point out that we have reduced the capital transfer from 600,000 down to 300,000. So we have generated a saving of 300,000 for 2025.

In relation to the ARV for 2025, we do recognise the cumulative impact of energy inflation costs on local businesses over the past few years even though inflation has stabilised at the moment, as I say, the last five years I think it was 21.5%, we've seen an increase. So in recognition of that and the fact that we are still paying out a number of business supports in the form of the power-up grant schemes, the recommendation is to leave the ARV rate unchanged at 0.217 for 2025. However, this is an area that we will have to look at closely for 2026 if we want to maintain and enhance our services going forward.

In relation to the vacancy abatement rate, new legislation that was brought in earlier this year required public consultation which was held a couple of months ago as well as a financial impact report, and that report was circulated along with the budget book last week. The recommendation that has been made is to reduce the current rate of 60% to 20% for next year. This will generate additional income to the budget of 465,000 which will help to balance our budget and we also hope it will incentivise property owners to do something with their properties; to either sell them, to lease them or convert them into residential use. It also compliments the Council's rates incentive scheme for new businesses that reoccupy vacant properties, whereby they don't pay the full rates until year three of their business. And we also expect that it would improve the streetscapes of our towns and villages. And just to note to

everyone that this recommendation was brought to the CPG and it was approved by the Corporate Policy Group.

So just to give an overview of the budget this year. It is 168.2 million. That represents an increase of 8.1 on last year, 5%. And I suppose the two key areas that we try to look at in that budget is for housing and climate action, and you can see they represent the biggest increases of 6% for housing and in environmental services, which includes climate action, a 10% increase.

So how do we fund these services? We have four main sources of income. Grants and subsidies is the biggest source. It represents 78.5 million, 47%. You can see the detail of that in the budget book on page 76, table E. Goods and services 24%, just over 40 million. That can be looked at on page 75 of the report. That's table D. And that would cover such things as housing rent, parking income, planning fees, fire charges and payment from Uisce Eireann for services done on their behalf. We've already outlined the commercial rates, 32.5 million, 19%. And then finally, Local Property Tax, 17.2 million, which represents 10% of the overall budget.

So just to go through the budgetary challenges. Inflationary impact. As I have said, while it is coming under control, from 2019 to 2024 there was a 21.5% increase which did obviously impact on our spending power. The annual issue that we face of increase pay in pension costs that we need to fund. Our climate action commitments. We have a new climate action plan and obviously we've energy targets that must be met by 2030. Increased demand for housing services in the situation we're in and there's always a continued demand for road improvements. We also have match funding capital commitments; usually we only get 70% to 80% of any projects funded so we need to find that 30% from our own resources. And also there's the implementation of new Government policies. We get communications from regular departments outlining new schemes, new policies that are being brought in, that brings extra demands and extra cost. And while in a lot of cases we do receive funding for new staff that doesn't cover the overheads that are associated with the staff. So it is another challenge that we have to face. Additional ICT requirements. We're moving to Office 365. We have additional cyber security requirements. And there's an increased move towards digital services. So all this contributes to an

additional requirement under the ICT heading. The age-old issue of discretionary versus non-discretionary costs. I will go through a slide on that in more detail. And after all these challenges we must, per legislation, approve the balance budget. In other words, our expenditure has to match our income.

So, just on the non-discretionary costs. When preparing the budget we must take account of a number of restrictions that we face: Payroll costs, covering wages, salaries and pensions, over 60 million, 40% of our budget. Obviously once people are in situ, they are there; we can't cut costs in that area. There's also grant-funded or contra items, as we refer to them. So, it is money in, money out. So, that would include things like the RAS and the HAP, the DPGs, homeless funding, road grants, SICAP, LEO, sports partnership, Irish Water and machinery yard. Other non-discretionary costs would be our light and heat, our insurance, loan interest and the statutory requirements that we need to pay. So that's up to approximately 90% of our budget.

So this leaves us around 10%. What does that cover? Regional and local roads maintenance, own resources; public lighting; housing repairs and maintenance; community grants; environmental initiatives; arts and festivals; library book purchases; economic and tourism supports; match funding for capital programmes; and discretionary funding for the municipal districts. But obviously we don't want to cut any of these services. While they are considered discretionary we would consider them vital services as well. So we do everything we can when we prepare the budget to try and avoid cutting back any of our existing services.

In relation to the Corporate Policy Group. The Local Authority Act provides the legislation for how the budget is prepared, and the adoption of the budget is a reserved function of the members of the local authority. Under the legislation the CPG should assist with the setting of the overall parameters and the identification of the issues and approaches to be taken.

So the CPG met with the Executive on the 4th, the 11th and the 18th November to go through all of the issues that would have been outlined in the budget book and in the Chief Executive's Foreword Letter. So all those issues were discussed and agreed

upon. So I just want to put on record my thanks to the CPG for their input and direction in relation to that.

Now just to go through, I suppose, the detail of what's in the budget this year under a number of headings. Just to start with off, pay and pensions. A total of 61.7 million is included, an increase of 4.3 million on last year. Nearly 40% of the total expenditure it represents. So it is a big chunk of our overall budget. For this budget we have made the assumption that the full cost of recruitment will be made for the Retained Firefighters WRC Agreement implementation. And we also have to take into account the Government compensation which is usually around a minimum of 85% of any national pay agreement increases.

I know at the MD meetings that I met with the members for the GMA, a number of people highlighted additional outdoor staff. I suppose just to highlight the fact that this is linked to our Uisce Eireann transition, because the workers currently working in the water services area have up until the end of 2026 to decide whether to move to Uisce Eireann or actually stay within Wicklow County Council. If they stay within Wicklow County Council they obviously have to be redeployed within certain areas, and that may be MD areas as well. So we don't want to be left with surplus staff. So that is an added complication in relation to that area. But I suppose tied in with this is, we have commenced a new strategic workforce plan and work has just commenced on that. We are -- I suppose we have to produce this particular plan after the adoption of our corporate plan, which is near completion.

And just finally to finalise, or just to highlight the point that our pension costs, which are fully funded by Wicklow County Council, we get no outside funding for that, are 8.8 million, and that's an increase of 700,000 on 2024. As outlined in the Chief Executive Letter, the CCMA Finance Committee are bringing forward proposals on this particular issue to the Department to try and address this concern, especially giving an ageing work force. So there's a bubble that in the background and we just hope that over the next few years this matter can be resolved.

Housing and building. We have increased expenditure of 3.5 million in this area. That would include extra rental income of 900,000 which brings it up to 19.3. And

all of that income has been retained within the housing area. Where it's gone to: Pre-letting increase of 400,000. So that's a total of 5.4 million that we have allocated for that area of which we receive 1.2 million of Government funding. Housing repairs and maintenance will see an increase of 324,000 up to a total of 3.1 million. And we have made a small additional provision of 190,000 for heat pump servicing, conditional surveys and radon remediation.

Housing of the homeless will see increased funding next year, so it will be up 268,000 to now 3.2 million. And our payment and availability expenditure and income has increased by 1.9 million up to 23.1.

Just moving on to roads. The allocation is up by 1 million to 31.1. Basically we have matched the -- more or less matched the budget for 2025 with the revised 2024 allocation. When I say revised 2024 allocation, that's the allocations that we got in the first quarter of this year from the Department. The allocations for next year will see regional road maintenance a decrease of 260,000 but this is offset by a local roads maintenance increase of 1.1 million. That is basically to match where the demand is. The Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project, PLEEP, will see an increase of 150,000. This is a multimillion euro project. We are part of the eastern region rollout which will be commencing maybe later on this year, so we have to make a provision in respect of that. So the provision is now at 350,000 per annum.

Car parking costs have been reduced by 271,000. That's to do with a new contract which is split into four different lots and it's brought in greater efficiencies and savings in that area. And, as I said before, the proper roads budget won't be determined until we do get our roads allocations from the Department and TII in quarter 1, 2025.

Development management sees increases in town regeneration, 64,000. We want to produce town plans for our main towns and villages throughout the county, so a provision has been made in that respect. Tourism promotion has been increased by 63,000. Forward planning, a 400,000 increase. This is mainly salaries in respect of funding positions. Planning fees have seen a reduction of 228,000. That's based on year-to-date income that we have received in that area. Possibly we were maybe

overly optimistic in relation to the income for the budget in 2024, so that has been readjusted. Match funding increase of 100,000 due to a payment we received from IPV. And our Small Business Rates Incentive Scheme has increased by 63,000. That's due to additional take-up that we have noticed during this year. SICAP is a contra; it is an in and out increase of 750,000 based on increased funding. And we have also made provision for the GRID. Obviously a number of you were at the official opening a number of weeks ago, at the fantastic facility, so we have now made a provision for the expenditure, the maintenance, the ongoing costs and rental income for that particular building.

In respect of environment, as we said one of the key areas is climate action, so our Climate Action Plan allocation remains at 230,000 in respect of implementation of initiatives within that plan. The Mid-East Energy Bureau is fully up and running. So the cost of that is 456,000. However, that is offset by contributions from the three other local authorities that are involved in the bureau as well as SEAI. We have put forward a provision of 490,000 for implementing energy initiatives next year. That's an increase of 50,000. And there's also a fully funded local biodiversity action fund that's been brought in for 2025.

Wicklow and Arklow harbours will see an increase of 167,000. That's mainly to do with the implementation of CCTV security systems on both harbours as well as some other small works around the areas. Five service operations, 1.3 million. That mainly includes the implementation of the WRC agreement. And street cleaning sees an increase of 116,000. That increase is to match ongoing demand in that particular area. And recycling centre fees has an increase of 60,000, and that's based on year-to-date income we've received to date, so we've adjusted that upwards.

In relation to community and recreation. Our Community Grant Scheme has been retained at 120,000. Library operations has seen a 282,000 increase. That's mainly due to extra staff and also security costs associated with the Open Library Programme. Library Book Fund has also been retained at 300,000 per annum. Outdoor leisure operations sees an increase of 417,000. That will cover a number of areas such as parks and open spaces, Wicklow Way maintenance, Glendalough Master Plan implementation and beach maintenance. Recreational development,

which covers Sports Partnership and Healthy Ireland, will increase by 144,000 up to 845,000. But this is, as I said, based on increased funding, so it is a contra item.

And finally the last heading is miscellaneous. The NPPR income has been reduced by 150,000 down to a nominal amount of 50,000. That schemes ceases entirely on the 1st April 2025. Our insurance costs see an increase of 247,000 due to a number of extra policies that the Council plan to purchase for next year. IPB dividends, an increase of 131,000. That mainly relates to a one-off special provision to the members in recognition of the impact of the personal injury guidelines and the impact that has had on claims. Investment income sees an increase of 375,000. And our pay compensation from the Department has been increased by 2.46 million for next year. ICT expenditure increase, as I mentioned earlier, sees an increase of 330,000. And we've identified savings in relation to commercial rates administration due to 300,000 we've reduced on our Valuation Tribunal appeals provision, and also over 400,000 on the rates vacancy write-off. On the flip side of that we have increased our new commercial property valuations by 100,000 for the coming year.

So to summarise the budget for 2025. It's 168 million. An increase of 8 million, or 5%, on last year. It avoids reductions to our existing services. It sees a focus on housing and climate action, and it also provides for increases across most services to address pay increases, cost inflation and increased demands in these services. It also includes provision of 1.3 million for discretionary funding for the municipal districts. And it includes a proposal to retain the commercial rates, ARV, at 0.217 but also to reduce the Vacancy Abatement Rate to 20%.

So I think, members, overall it is a very positive budget that will support and benefit a lot of groups and citizens throughout the county in 2025.

So that concludes the presentation side of things. Myself and the other directors now will take any questions that you have on the budget. We will take them within groupings. The first grouping put forward will be housing and roads. So I will just return to my chair and we can take questions after that. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thanks, Brian. We will open up to housing and roads. Councillor Peter Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thank you, chair, and thank you, Brian. Just before we open it to housing and roads I would like to make a general comment on the budget from someone who's new to the process and looking at it for the first time. That even with someone with a financial background it is quite hard to follow exactly what we're voting on here today. And I know I raised this before, and I know probably the CPG maybe has been brought through it in more detail, but you talk about 10% discretionary funding and spend, but actually if we've 11 million on housing repairs, which equates to 7%, then really all we're voting on here today is 3% of the total spend in the budget. And I think if that was mapped out in the one position of actually this is where we have room to move money from one pot to the other it would be a lot easier for the members to actually decide and approve a budget and ensure that we can direct the resources we have the power to move and direct. So that is just a general comment before we go on to housing and maintenance.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yes. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Again just before we get into the budget. Are we making a copy of the budget available to everyone, a hard copy? No? It is quite difficult to be honest in regards to going through this whether it be on the iPad or the mobile. I am just wondering is there any spare copies printed out?

MR GLEESON: We have kind of moved away from that. We don't provide hard copies for any other meeting for the Council, any monthly meeting. All the information is up on Decision Time, and it is emailed. So we have kind of moved away from that I suppose. We're trying to implement green initiatives within the Council, that would be the rationale there.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, just in regards to that. We are dealing with 168.2 million of a budget here, which when we analyse it and break it down, as you quite correctly pointed out, you're down to 10% of that that we have, that we can discuss and perhaps implement here today. But the truth is, like, I have noticed last year's budget meeting was over in record time, and record time, and I imagine it will be over in record time today as well. It just makes us look very silly as 32 elected members when there'd be very little questions asked here today. I remember in years gone past when everyone had the opportunity to have the documentation in front of them and they were able to analyse it in detail, and I think it made for a better Council overall, because questions were asked at the budget meeting that satisfied

people to their liking for the rest of the year. And I have no doubt that we will go away from here today wondering what in the hell's gone on there, 168.2 million and we don't know for we haven't had the opportunity to delve down into it. And I do accept, and I do accept that you did send it out and we do have it, but I am saying when we were given a copy, and indeed back in the day we used to take a break as well during the budget meeting to allow for people, we didn't take them quite as much in block as well. This budget meeting will be over very, very quickly. And I think we're not getting an opportunity to delve down. I certainly feel that way. Others might not. And I understand in regards to, you know, the rationale behind not printing it out, but there's 101 documents. We're certainly not looking for the 101 documents you have outlined and gave a perfectly explanation to the budget, and as head of finance obviously you understand it more so than anyone else, but there is possibly about 20 pages there that I believe every member of this chamber should have in front of them, which is outlining income and expenditure, and proposed expenditure for 2025. And all I'm asking for is the possibility of having that available to the members here today. If that meant halting proceedings for ten minutes, so be it. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. And the Chief Executive wants to come in here, and then I'll let other people in.

MS O'GORMAN: Members, I suppose the budget documents are circulated ten days in advance and we didn't have any request from any member looking for a printout at that stage. If we had have we might have facilitated it. I'm not proposing to go printing documents now at this stage. We can certainly look at it for next year, to do an executive summary, with the tables and members, absolutely. I am going to put on record not a single person asked in advance of the meeting today, other than this morning, for hard copies of the document. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. Councillor Silvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you to the Director of Finance for that very interesting presentation on the budget. There's just a couple of points I'd like to make, based first of all on the presentation there because I think it is very well engineered. There's a couple of things that I wouldn't be entirely happy about. First of all, the 20% rebate which is dropping from 60%. And it was mentioned that in response to the concerns I think that were raised earlier that we should be encouraging more businesses to either, you know, let their properties or to

redevelop them for accommodation, but do I feel we are speaking out of both sides of our mouth here because -- I am thinking of a case we had in Arklow, on Upper Main Street, last year or maybe the year before. An applicant who I made representations for, along with all the other Arklow councillors, had a premises on the Upper Main Street, wanted to convert it to residential. We made loads of representations to the planning department, they refused. Subsequently a year later he got permission from An Bord Pleanála. So, you know, we are really speaking out of both sides of our mouth on that. We need to do something to encourage people to do that. Perhaps should we make it exempt from planning in some of these non-core areas? The argument at the time was that it was core retail, but it wasn't, it was Upper Main Street. So I would like to see more clarity on that and a bit more progressive thinking from management to encourage people to actually go that route, to feel confident in going that route, that they're not going to be bogged down with red tape from our planning department.

Secondly, I am glad to see we are increasing the budget for the health and maintenance. I would like to see more money go into that. As you know, you're probably getting representations from many people in our older housing stock, even houses that are only ten years old, about how cold they are and how draughty they are, and windows and doors need upgrading and more insulation needed. Anything that can be done to improve their positions I would be very grateful for. If it means to draw down funding nationally throughout the year I think we should be receptive to sorting that out.

The local road maintenance is up, which is great, but it is still only a drop in the ocean. Councillors and candidates are out there now at the moment and they're inundated with requests from people in rural areas looking for improvements to our road network, especially people who have recently building even out in the rural areas and have paid levies, they're looking for improved road maintenance. I appreciate that.

And also in regards to public lighting, seeing as we are on that section, the last point I would make on that is that I really think we need to improve an awful lot on our public lighting. You mentioned there we have a new contractor appointed but I

would really like to see that benchmarked against other county councils, perhaps in the NOAC report that we get every year. It is something that the public, who are paying their property taxes, are entitled to. It creates huge issues when lights go out in multiple areas, multiple lights are out, for older people who want to get out at night, for residents, and they're not getting value for their property tax. It is the core of the property tax, is public lighting. And we need to really pull up our socks and improve that substantially. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. In fairness, I have had three speakers but two of them have been answered so I am going to keep going because I have another two. So, Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I have to say I agree with everything that has been said by the previous three speakers. Just on a general point, Councillor Stapleton is a man who has already got very valuable financial expertise and experience, and when he says, quite reasonably, that it's quite difficult for someone even with expertise to understand, how the rest of the councillors, including myself, are expected to deal with flashing up, flashing images there on the screen and an email, when at every other budget meeting that I have ever attended there was a budget document presented in hard copy, posted to all of the members in good time for them to look at it and judge it and make their own judgment about whether they're going to support the budget or not. Now, I would say to the members, it's actually not a Chief Executive decision whether we get a printed copy or not. We are the people who decide whether we get a printed copy. And if Councillor Snell makes a reasonable request that at least we get the essential document, the essential number of pages, let's decide we're going to do it. And let's break for half an hour so we do get the time. I'm not going to accept the Chief Executive telling us she's not going to start printing documents now. Because if the members of this Council decide not to pass the budget there's nothing the people at the top table can do about it. Where 20% of the budgets of this term will be decided today, this is one-fifth of the important meetings we're going to have in this term, and if the Executive can't be bothered to provide us with the information in a form that is legible we should take that decision into our own hands. And I would certainly support what Councillor Snell has said as a very minimum that we take time to get the information, the vital information printed so that we can consider it. Let's make the decision that we have the power to make rather than it be accepting somebody at the top telling us you can't

have it in the format that you want it. And for future reference, I think for every other budget this should be a printed document as it always has been the tradition, sent to the members by post so that they can have it in good time for their own consideration. That's the first point.

Secondly, I would love to hear a lot more from Councillor Stapleton about what he thinks about other elements of the budget. Because here we have somebody, if you like, who is an elected representative who has expertise, has analytical ability, and is well able to express what he feels are the important issues. And rather than always just listening to this side of the house we should be listening to somebody who has expertise, such as Councillor Stapleton. And we have plenty of time today to do that. And I would certainly be interested in his further opinions about other aspects of the budget.

If we're going forward into the two programme groups I want to make one or two points if I can, Chairman, quickly with regard to particularly the roads element. I just want to put it on the record here, you know, I have been canvassing for the last three weeks, and I can say honestly there will be civil disobedience on the streets of Bray, Enniskerry and Kilmacanogue if plan to proceed with closure of the roads onto N11 happens. It is a budgetary matter. Because €5 million has previously been spent by this Council drawing up consultants' reports for a much wider scheme that would I think keep everybody happy, but that has been denied us by the Department of Transport. For the record can I say I have never in my life experienced the strength of feeling from people in the Bray, Enniskerry and Kilmacanogue, particularly in Bray, about this proposal to close particularly the Herbert Road. Just putting that on the record.

We had our first meeting of the Transport SPC -- and this is my second point, and I will finish on this -- on the programme on roads where we talked about public lighting and the scandalous situation we have where people are paying a property tax and we cannot, cannot repair the public lighting, and people are stuck in darkness all around this county. Now, I put forward a policy proposal at that meeting and the director of that relevant department has indicated he's going to come back with a report in the future, which is going to be three months away but I just want to put it

out here for consideration.

I think, I don't think what we're spending a third of a million or something on this particular programme group, and what I wanted to suggest was that we bring that work in-house. We actually train up our own electricians, we get our own crew, we provide our own vehicles and we get and we repair the lights that are out of action when they're out of action, rather than this innocence where we have a new contractor appointed. Again Councillor Stapleton, I'm turning into his number one fan here but I have to say what he said on the last occasion about we gave a contract to a new contractor who then said he hadn't got the resources to fulfil the contract and we just actually gave him the contract and we obviously knew that. So why not have a bit more faith in our own ability and actually do this work ourselves and provide some kind of a service for the people who need it? Again it's not a specific budgetary item or proposal but I do think it is something that the members should consider. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian, do you want to come back in there?

MR GLEESON: Yes, just I suppose to clarify issues in relation to the budget book. The budget book hasn't been posted out to the members for a number of years now. The last couple of years, on request, a few hard copies were printed out on the day of the budget meeting. That was on request from a number of councillors in advance of the meeting. So, as the Chief Executive has said already, we got no requests from any of the members. The budget book was issued ten days ago, so there was plenty of time for any requests in that regard. So just to put on point, it isn't automatically posted out. That hasn't happened in a number of years. So just clarifying those particular facts. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Brian, thanks for the presentation. You know you've got to do what you've got to do and what I would say is that for me, just looking at the total package and what's been said by a number of councillors to date, I think makes an awful lot of sense and we should actually listen to what has been said and draw points from the contributions. The fact that the commercial rates are not being increased I think is a great situation in the current climate. But I'd like to maybe just make an observation which I have done before as well with the process.

I find this process almost a waste of time, and I am saying that and I am not being unfair to the Executive either because it has to be a waste of time for the Executive as well. Most of us in the chamber here, both sides of the chamber, know how the system works and understands money and finance and, okay, it's good to have people in the chamber with expertise as well, but the process we go through here, and it's getting worse, is what I would describe as a prescriptive process. We've talked over the years about, because I have asked, going and getting changes so as that we get better money into the system. As contributions so far this morning have noted that we really at the end of the day here can only discuss roughly 10% of the budget today. We must approve a balanced budget, as Brian you have outlined to us, and then on top of that the Local Government Act basically determines how the budget is assembled. And really, as I look at the process, and I have said this before, unless we are given a structure where we can create funding -- and I mean create funding in a -- I don't mean taxing people to the nth degree, I mean create funding where we can operate as an entity properly we are going nowhere. Because next year, as you indicated, Brian, we're going to have a bigger challenge and a bigger challenge. And while we have 168 million, at the end of the day while it sounds a big figure it is not even covering our basic requirements in the final analysis after you extrapolate key costings and key things that have to be covered. For example, 40% of our budget you are telling us is for pay and pensions, and that's very, very important, but pay and pensions should not be part of our budget process here. I passionately believe that. And I am not saying that for the first time.

So unless there's some flesh put on this desire that we change what we're doing and we get the Department to change and fund it, because you know what's happened over the last 15, 20 years, our local government fund has been cut and cut and cut and cut. And some of it has been cut with the benefit of hindsight on false pretences because the rationale and the reasons why it was cut in some cases no longer exists, but we still don't have the budget.

So your job I would say upfront is impossible. Our job, it is like a talking shop and we're talking to ourselves and nothing happens. So I would respectfully ask that -- and I don't know in God's name how Kildare done their budget in 26 minutes.

I'd love to have been a fly on the wall for that one. Maybe there was nobody in the chamber, like there was here at four minutes to ten this morning.

I just think the process is all wrong and it is frustrating and it is -- I just find it -- I find it an utter waste of time. I would like that record. But I would ask that what the contributors before me have said I think makes an awful lot of sense and they're talking sense, and we have to listen to that and I don't think we are sometimes.

So just maybe a quick comment on the two sections. And I want to just comment on roads, footpaths and road markings. Our county, my district, and I know from other districts because I travel around the county, it is in a deplorable condition. Now, roads -- ditches are hanging out on roads, no road markings, people driving in the middle of the road, just to use road markings as an example. In my district alone we could do with 3, 4 million in our budget to do the works that need to be done. It's not going to happen. And then we talk about a discretionary budget that wouldn't even put in 150 metres of footpath. That's the reality. And then we have 38,000 in our discretionary budgetary to arm wrestle in the chamber about whether we spend this or spend it on that. Do we give someone two grand because they're running a nice festival, or do we do this or that. You know, the whole process is broken. It's ridiculous. And you could get into the national scene where we have all these money and we've all this money. But at local government we have no money and all we're getting is basically, in comparative terms we're getting petty cash to keep the kind of fire hardly burning. So unless we change it and unless, Brian, we can actually have a real conversation with whoever the mystery people are in the Department -- and, you know, I have said this before as too, when we talk about the Department who in the Department are we talking about? I mean who is making these decisions? Who is holding us back? Who is telling us that we hear you but we're not listening to you? I mean is anything going to come out of the talks you would have, you know, with the Department?

I think this is a national problem and I think it's a national disaster, and it doesn't get discussed because in my view the role we play as councillors is being grossly undermined, and I have talked that to death over the last four or five years, and it's all part of the one cake. And unless we're going to listen and unless we're going to

change, we could come down here and have a budget meeting in four minutes, because that's what it amounts to.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Can I just say something before I ask the Chief Executive to come in? I am just conscious of what's been said and I understand the rationale behind it, but we also do have an important function here to play as in passing the budget, and I also want to see drilled down into this here as much as we can. We are on housing and roads, so I would like to hear some questions on houses and roads in it as well, if that's okay. We can talk here all day about the process and we can talk about what should be done and what shouldn't be done, but we're here to negotiate -- sorry, discuss a budget and I want to drill down into it, so if we can just stick to the questions -- very, quickly Tom. I am not being rude to you.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: I know you're not. Just on clarifications because I don't want it to slip over in the conversation. I have asked a question on the section.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I know that. Please don't get personal when I -- I am talking in a broader sense, not honing in on one councillor. Tom, I was going to say it before you had to say what you had to say. I want to concentrate on what we are here for today, and that is the budget that we have here before us. And I think the Chief Executive wants to come in there.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, members. I do really hear what you are saying. It is extremely frustrating; it is extremely frustrating for us as a management team trying to frame a budget when we have very little discretion on how we move or how we apportion the small funds that we do have. And Councillor Stapleton you put it really well in that we are really only talking about, you know, single figure percentages when it comes to what actual real funds we have to allocate across the county. That's the process that we operate under. It's through legislation, it's through regulation passed in the Houses of Oireachtas and passed down.

As a sector we have voiced our concerns about the funding model for local government since the abolition of the Local Government Fund and the move to the property tax, and everything else, and the answer we get ordinarily is that property tax is within your gift, you can raise that if you want. That's a way to raise it. I know, I know, it's a political decision and that doesn't work either.

Our only other method currently of raising funds is through commercial rates. And we have said this before, our county is not comparable on a commercial rates basis to the likes of Fingal, or South Dublin or Dun Laoghaire, where you have swathes of industrial lands, where you have large multinationals based who can easily afford an increase in commercial rates compared to the much smaller to medium size businesses and enterprises that operate in Wicklow, where any change in commercial rate has a much greater impact on the business. And when we're struggling with dereliction and vacancies in our town centres, like Councillor Bourke articulated in Arklow, you know, it is a real challenge as to how could you fathom increasing commercial rates to generate more income for us to distribute when we have businesses struggling to survive in our towns and villages. So that is I suppose primarily why we have stayed away from the commercial rate in our budgets in the last number of years, because its effect is disproportionate on the businesses in Wicklow compared to another county that has much larger multinational businesses in place.

So that being said, we have very limited funds. I know our budget has on paper has gone up, but really that is just dealing with inflation. Our actual real spend is pretty much the same as last year, if not less because what we get for every euro we spend is far less than what we would have gotten 12 months ago.

I might ask Joe to comment on the public lighting piece because it has come up by a number of members, and then go back to the floor, Chair, thank you.

MR LANE: Just in the short-term, yeah, we have a new contract and we are working to increase its capacity. The important thing is to ensure you all keep sending in the -- whereas we have the information at the moment where it should be 2%, we reckon 4% of the lights are out. We need to know that information. We will look at going back to the SPC we will do a costing on doing it ourselves. It is an expertise we currently don't have. It is something we could build on. So we would have that back in February. There is a little bit of work on that. Somebody said compared to national or others we're not the only local authority in this situation in the private sector tendering. I don't know, if we haven't given a report on that we will have it for next Monday.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Joe. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks to Brian and the team for the 101-page document. I'd say it is zero craic putting it together when there's not much manoeuvrability. And two tiny points I would make, Cathaoirleach, and I do have a point and I drill down on what you are saying, and curiosity. But I think ultimately regardless of how much scope we have as members to move or manoeuvre funds we are still accountable for the whole package. So that's our responsibility. And again, I won't repeat what has been said by other members. And the other added thing I would say, which would be really interesting for me as well, is that, as Brian outlined, I would like to believe that in the CPG meetings we have members represented in those spaces as well. I'd be fascinated to see how they contribute to the process in that space, which is a space where there's opportunities I would suggest to make a contribution that's substantive and meaningful.

My question is: Yeah, and maybe I missed the page, but drilling down into, and again maybe the detail isn't available but the broad strokes, so for housing and homeless, or housing the homeless, and it's called administration of homeless services, 3.2 million, just to get a sense of what the scope of that is when we drill down. Is that staffing? Is there a capital in there? What does that look like? Again I am imaging if there was a drop-down menu it might give me a sense of that. I am asking again just to be -- because again we're tracking the journey of this money and the outcomes and the impact of it, and you know we're accountable for that in our own right as members. But I'd love to just get a flavour even or broad strokes of what is sitting in there within that 3.2 million, having gone up 268k, what does that equip us to do in such an important topic? Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Very quickly I will answer about the CPG. I chair the CPG, as Cathaoirleach, and the chairs of the SPCs would be on CPG. It is my first time on CPG, but every chair made a valuable input into this budget I can safely say and spoke up at every meeting. And we have had two meetings prior to this specifically about the budget. Just to clarify that, okay? And thanks for your question. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: Thank you very much, Cathaoirleach. And I know you have asked us to stay specific, Cathaoirleach, but I rarely speak in this chamber so I am going to take the opportunity. We have had lots of statements made on record in this chamber. The use of this space, although it is supposed to be today

for the budget, to make political statements and election statements, statements about civil unrest that are nearly equal to Trump-like statements, mansplaining of our roles and responsibilities, which is getting a little bit tiresome I have to say from my own personal perspective. And I would just call for a level of respect for the process and respect for the individuals who put their faith in each of us in this room. We've had colleagues describe this process as tick-box exercise, something that could be done in four minutes. This is a role that we have, a reserved function that we have and I think it deserves a bit of respect. The CPG have discussed this budget on two separate occasions, quite detailed and we have had feedback within our own grouping on that. The Chief Executive made a statement about the budget being in hard copy and how not one person requested that in hard copy and yet that seems to have been lost, and I think we all have a collective and individual responsibility if you want something in hard copies ask for it. We are all adults. It was issued ten days ago. There are people in this room who have spent a significant amount of time going through this budget line-by-line reaching out to Brian for guidance and advice which he has been only too forthcoming in doing. So I think the process should be respected, and that we should allow those individuals to ask their questions and we should be -- I mean we all know there's an election going on at the moment, you know, it's like the elephant in the room, but can we just look at what we're doing here at the moment in this room, the individuals who have asked us to come and represent them and look at the budget for the next year. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin.

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Thank you. This is my first budget so it is all very new and a lot of pages to read through. I will make a comment that I was well able to printout whatever pages I needed to go through, so I don't need anything printed out today. Although I welcome this budget but however I do kind of agree with Councillor O'Brien there that maybe when we do receive it electronically like that a little bit more detail, I would welcome that even in a drop-box, that you're able to drill more into the figures and see breakdowns, it would make it -- we're responsible for it going out there, that maybe under a heading we are able to have more information to see what exactly each heading is more into. So I would welcome that across the board, not just on housing and transport. And also, I suppose a bugbear that will come up with me later on is what goes down to the municipal districts especially Greystones, because I know we never get enough

compared to every other district. So beware, I'm on my way. I am glad to see the Chapel Road project is listed. I'm happy with that. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I'm glad you're happy. We still only have two questions, so I am going to keep going. Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. Look, first and fore point on a point of clarification. Many a times we come into this chamber and we have been handed documentation on presentations and the like. I personally feel that it's too big of a project to be just thrown away there that we're not printing it out. I personally would have preferred had it been done the way it had been for many, many decades where people had the report to hand. You've explained your rationale behind it; I still don't agree with it. And I understand that the documentation was sent digitally ten days ago, but the reality is I would have expected the report to be on the desk here today. That's what I would have expected. It just adds to having a little bit of openness and transparency. And the reality is that I do have the documentation, the same as everyone else, but it is quite difficult on a day like this to keep scrolling up and down and back and forth while I know a lot of the officials perhaps have it printed out themselves.

If I could just ask a couple of questions, because I assume I'm not getting a copy? I would like a copy, just of the tables.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will give it to you now.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thank you. A number of questions. Just it has been mentioned in regards to public lighting, 2.4 million operating costs, 250,000 services reports. Yet nobody has explained, we all know the problems that are out there in regards to this new contract that's been signed, and the service level agreement has not been adhered to. So, for 2.6. But could I ask questions in regards to the contract that was signed. Is it signed that they get paid per light that they fix, or is it just an open-ended contract that you're responsible to fix the lights from January to December, end of year? You have given a commitment there to a previous speaker in regards to having a look at that, and maybe the Council take it over. And I am sure that is a big task in itself, but if I could just have some sort of feedback in regard to that contract. It's a lot of money.

Also just in regards to maintenance and management of car parks. BO901. So €400,000 per annum put towards that. And again it is just to get a breakdown to distinguish between the maintenance and the management. They are both coupled in there together. We have a lot of car parks, particularly in my own municipal district, such as Brittas Bay and Glendalough; are they incorporated in this management of car parks? Is it more generalised in regards to, like, what we have in the town here, we have a number of car parks down the Morrough, within AIB car park and further afield up at the top of the town? I am just wondering what is the breakdown in that. And then of course we know if it's the management I assume that's the management company, i.e. the people who look after the car parking, and going around looking after the costs that people pay in regards parking in car parks. So, is it farmed out to a private company?

In regards to BO801, school wardens, 214,300. Just to get a list in regards to how many school wardens do we have in the whole county of Wicklow? There's no -- it wouldn't seem like there's very many because that obviously incorporates their wages, I assume, or is that outside of their wages? Because if it is I would imagine it's in single figures for a county of our size.

And then the other one I want clarification on is housing loan, 1.8 million projected for 2025. 1.8 million, again if that's all we're envisaging that we're going to set aside for housing loans, then maybe, Chief Executive, you could give me, and I'm open to correction, give me some clarification on that. Because if it's to do with, you know, local authority home loan, is it separate to the local authority home loan? Because if it is again it would only service seven, eight properties for the whole year of 2025, i.e. seven or eight people would be able to acquire a home loan. Because there is no level of detail in it. It's just saying 1.8 million housing loan. Is it a separate loan or is it something to do with the home loan? And if it's nothing to do with our local authority home loan where people can acquire a loan through the local authority to go out and purchase their own properties, such as the affordable scheme, because I don't see anywhere else. Now, as I say, it is very hard to make it out here on the phone, but they're just a number of questions on this section. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian, do you want to take some of them?

MR GLEESON: Yes, I will take a few. Just Councillor O'Brien, in relation to the breakdown of the homeless. The main breakdown will be 2 million of that would be for agency services. So it would be paying obviously the homes providers. There's a number that we work with. So that's the bulk of it. There would be about 400,000 of pay costs. And then there'd be 664 relates to, it's under support services it comes up as, that would be our central management booklet. We have about 25 million that would be considered central management charges. That has to be spread out. So that's the format in which it is done. So that's how that's broken down.

Just in relation to a couple of points being made. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin made the point about the budget book. I suppose, look, as is the process, the budget book is as per legislation and the format that's it's produced in is per legislation. We have to produce the book in that way. You go onto the website of any other county council and the budget book is the exact same and that's what we have to produce. I fully accept that it is not user-friendly. It is actually -- it is frustrating for us in finance as well. So it is frustrating. But I will make the point and I suppose it touches on what Councillor Snell said about openness and transparency, which I would strongly disagree with, for that reason, given that it is not particularly user-friendly, there was a 12-page Chief Executive board letter that was included at the start which goes into significant detail, flags all the main issues, all the adjustments that are being made, and in fairness in my presentation here this morning as well, I went into a huge amount of detail in relation to that to assist all the members in that regard because I am conscious it is not the easiest document to read, but there is no issue of no transparency here. I would say we go beyond ourselves to actually highlight as much information we can do for the members in order that they can make an informed decision here today and every other year.

In relation to, I think Joe's mentioned about the contracts, the parking, Brittas Bay, Glendalough. That is actually separate. That'll be a franchise. They control the parking in relation to that. That's further on, that's under recreation. There would be the franchise agreements that are in place with the relevant companies there.

School wardens, that would be pay. I think a lot of them are actually part-time, so it would only be for a few hours each week. I don't have the exact list but I know the

main cost relates to Bray. I'm not sure whether -- how many they have in Bray but I think there's 118,000 or something of the costs relate to Bray. The rest of them would be smaller expenses in relation to Arklow, Greystones, Wicklow, Tinahely and so forth, but it'd only be kind of on a part-time basis. Two hours a day in relation to that. So it's small money.

In relation to the home loan, that would just be kind of repayments that are made. So it's not loans. The loans would be in our capital account. The full loan amounts. So that would just be in relation to repayments that are made each year. So there's no restrictions on the amount of -- like, you're talking about the local authority home loans, there's no restrictions in relation to that. That's not impacted by the figures here. That just covers interest and principal repayments being made each year. I think I have covered all those questions. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I just remind members we're still on housing and roads. Councillor Peter Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thank you, Chair. I wasn't sure the last time round that we included roads as well so I just have a few points to raise on that.

And just beforehand, if it is of benefit to the members, just because Joe has been talking me up, the way I look at it is that in every expenditure line there's an amount of which a certain portion of that is either funded or is on salary, and it's only that remaining amount that actually we have discretion over. But there is, as other members have pointed out, significant room for us to make decisions around what that amount is. I look at things like 2 million on street cleaning, 2 million on parks, pitches and open spaces, 1.4 million unfunded for climate change and flooding. And I suppose what the people who would have voted me in here would be asking for me to raise is that if someone did manage to make it down to South Wicklow with that street cleaner to look after any parks or pitches or to do something with the 1.4 million of climate change money they'd notice that the streets they're cleaning have no line markings on them, the footpaths beside them are crumbling, the lights on pedestrian walkings are out and haven't been fixed. And so, I suppose really within the roads budget I'd ask, you know, what we get from engineers over and over again is that actually there is no budget within there for footpaths, there is no budget for line markings and there's no budget for general repairs, but yet when I looked

through the budget it said that in BO3 to BO4 the general maintenance does include footpaths. So just a bit of clarity there. If there is a specific allocated amount we want to have there for line markings and for footpaths, because I think that's really important. We've 500,000 in there for tourism generally but I think really if we want to be attracting tourists to our areas in the first instance we should be ensuring they look like attractive place. If we could direct some of that money there it would be helpful.

Just a final point on public lighting. There was 2.6 million spent last year, and this year we're expecting to spend 2.6 million again even though last year the operator wasn't working for swathes of the year. So I would ask the question do you expect that to be the same, and if we think 2.6 million to be sufficient? That's all for now for me. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Avril Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks very much. I won't delay too long because Peter is far more articulate when it comes to financial issues than I am. Financial isn't my background. I suppose we're relying on Peter to help us out today. But just in relation to issues that come up. At the end of the day we have fight for our own area and, as you know, I represent the Baltinglass district. We don't have huge industry in our area to generate high rates of revenue for the Council, we don't have street parking either because obviously we don't have huge, big urban areas, and I suppose we never will have big industry coming to West Wicklow until we have the correct infrastructure. Again, we don't have correct road infrastructure, our N81 has been shelved, we don't have train lines, we don't have LUAS lines. So really it is going to be very hard to attract business to West Wicklow with the infrastructure that we have in place and as a result we're not going to have great revenue from businesses in the area. But at the end of the day we are relying on the Council to provide basic infrastructure, and it can be very, very frustrating for us as councillors when time and time again we're told we don't have the budget, we don't have funding for footpaths, we don't have funding for repairs, we don't have funding for roads. Public lighting has been mentioned time and time again this morning. I have raised it at a number of Council meetings. Peter has just raised it again there about the money that we spent last year although we didn't get the service that was meant to be provided to us. Again we're spending huge money again this year and I really hope that it will be

kept an eye on to make sure we are actually getting the service that we're paying for. I know any of us here in our personal lives if we're spending money we want the service that we've paid for and that should be no different with the public funding we have here within the Council.

In relation to our footpaths and our rural roads. Any time I ask for repairs to be done on our footpaths I'm told we have no funding. Any time I look for new footpaths we're told we have to look for schemes. Many of those schemes are not available to rural areas, to our rural villages, and again this is a huge impact in West Wicklow because we are a huge rural area, we are very small towns and villages, and again we're at a loss because we don't have the funding.

The last thing I just want to raise is, we talked about staff earlier. I know that our own engineering staff in the Baltinglass Municipal District are under a huge pressure. It's a huge area for them to cover. I know our two engineers are working tirelessly to try and cover everything but I would hope that maybe in the future we could see an increase in staff in the municipal district because I really do think that the lads are totally stretched in what they're doing and additional help would be a big benefit. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gail Dunne.

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just on public lighting. I suppose over the years I have been very unhappy with the way things have gone in this area. To me, this is not rocket science. The public lighting. And you know the red zone, people should know coming into the winter with the different weathers we're going to have, lighting is going to play -- and they should be ready for this. During the summer is not as bad. So that six months really during the winter where the lights go out makes a huge difference, you know the early evenings and like that, the darkness and things like that. So it is something that whoever, the new contractor needs to look at really during the next six months they want to be on top of their game as far as that is concerned.

The other thing, and again it's a problem with me, is footpaths. And in my area, Wicklow Town, we have a number of old housing estates built in the seventies and eighties where the footpaths have lasted 30 or 40 years but they're starting to

crumble. And road markings is a major issues. We're getting it, you know councillors are getting it as well, the fact that road markings, we're doing road markings and spending 80,000 on road markings on The Gap and Wicklow Town needs road markings and there's nothing being spent so. That is disappointing as far as I am concerned.

So there are a couple of issues there that really need to be looked at. But I just want to compliment Brian on his presentation. To be fair, it was an excellent presentation, and any staff will know from a previous life the time and effort to go into this budget. It's 170 million. It's a lot of money. I want to compliment Brian and his staff.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I have no more speakers. I will hand over to Brian.

MR GLEESON: Okay. I suppose most of the questions and comments are on roads. I will group them together and make a few points. We've 31 million of an allocation for roads. We could probably spend 60 million easily, albeit there's always capacity issues with our own staff and getting contractors in place. But look, there's huge demands out there. We know that the budget that we have isn't sufficient for the demands that there are across the county, albeit I suppose it should be noted that we do put in 12 million of our own resources. Of that 31 we get funded, yeah, just over 19. So we top off of that with our own funding of 12 million because we do feel it is an area that needs as much money as possible.

With regard to a specific footpath scheme, you will recall at the LPT meeting we did put forward a proposal to increase the LPT from 6% to 10% with that ring-fenced for footpath repairs. That wasn't passed. So there isn't a specific line within the budget for footpath repairs. I would note that some municipal districts are using part of their discretionary funding for footpath repairs. My own in Wicklow put aside 40,000 this year of its discretionary funding for footpath repairs. So that's an option in the municipal districts.

In relation to I think Councillor Cronin mentioned about new footpaths. We did give an allocation earlier this year of 100,000 to each municipal district for enhancing and improving footpaths, that would include new footpaths if there was a desire there.

I'm not sure how much you would get done with 100,000 in relation to new footpaths, but that was an option and there was funding provided in that regard.

In relation to, I suppose, the expenditure on public lighting. As I said, 350,000 is in relation to a capital transfer for the public lighting energy efficiency project, and the rest of it, 2.3, is for the normal operational contract costs. I think Joe spoke about that already. I suppose the expenditure is the expenditure. We hope that the new contractor will spend the full allocation that's been provided in that particular area.

So I think that's all the issues that were raised. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you, Brian. Councillor Peter Stapleton, you want to come back in there, still in relation to --

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yes. Just to come back on that point. Just in relation to the line item on funding -- or footpaths. The proposal was to ring-fence an increase in the Local Property Tax for footpaths, it wasn't to be used for any other purpose and I don't know why footpaths are singled out as the only one that falls victim to us not increasing the Local Property Tax. From what I am looking at, it looks like, as you correctly say, we put 12 million of our own funding into roads, about 6 million of that is to cover salary, again just looking at the figures roughly. So there we have 6 million that is at our discretion as to how we want to spend across roads, footpaths, lighting, and I think it would be a good move if we actually used a portion of that for footpaths. I don't know how anyone else in the chamber would feel.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just a quick comment on what Brian had said there about footpaths. For example, the kind of money that Brian is talking about, we can only talk about what we have and I fully understand that, but it's not, absolutely no way anywhere near -- I could physically show you an estate this morning where the footpaths are so bad it is just unreal and it would cost I reckon about 350,000 to do them. That's just one little estate, you know what I mean. What I am saying is: I know some councillors don't like some of the comments we make but we're making the comments -- I'm making the comments. I'm not playing politics. I'm not involved in any election at the moment. But the issue that we're faced with here with is providing a service to the people who put us

in here. And the money we have before us that we're discussing and the areas we're discussing, it's not there. So I mean that's a fact and I don't know what the solution to it is. I could think of a couple of solutions to it, but we need to come up with a solution, or when I say you come in here and you're basically wasting our time, that's the context of it. I am trying to put it in the context of what I am saying and talking about. I'm not playing politics and I am not playing games. If you look at the discretionary budget in our area, and whether it be 6% or 10% of property tax to me is irrelevant, it wouldn't do one real proper footpath job, and the demand is massive. And that's an issue and I know it isn't an issue for example, Chief Executive, you can solve. But it is an issue that is basically putting all of us behind.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. And I will just say that I don't want to go around in circles today. You're right in what you are saying, and Councillor Stapleton is right in what he is saying, we've been inundated not just at election time but all year around about the state of footpaths, they reckon half a million would take to fix the footpaths, but rather than keep bringing up footpaths I think we're all in agreement on something here. It's how we find a solution to move on. So, Brian, do you want to come back in there. Or, Chief Executive?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Can I make a point very quickly on that?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Make it quick.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Very quick. Just to say that if you're saying we're all in agreement here that we need to do something for footpaths and we're all in agreement that we have a certain percentage of this budget that is at our discretion yet we're deciding not to put a single cent towards footpaths that doesn't seem right.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That is why I am asking the Chief Executive to come in now.

MS O'GORMAN: Look, I hear what you are saying, and very honestly we don't have the money and we all know we don't have the money to do a comprehensive footpath repair programme around the county, or line marking or pothole repair or whatever it might be. So the budget, the 6 million or so, whatever it is, discretionary amount that is in the roads programme is prioritised by the engineers in roads for those areas that cause the greatest road safety issues in the county. Six million across a county the size of Wicklow with the amount of roads we have in Wicklow is not sufficient. So you know we fully, fully hear what you are saying on it. We're undertaking an examination of kind of how much would it cost us to do a comprehensive programme vis-à-vis what we actually have to spend and start

making the argument there because we don't have the resources to do it. We aren't open -- it is not open for grant funding in a lot of cases. So what senior engineers in the roads, Joe's directive, has to do is prioritise based on safety issues generally speaking. We have places in the county every time it rains or hard frost gets washed away, particularly our hilly slopes. That's the reality we're dealing with. We do not have the resources currently within that budget. I would say it is multiples of that 6 million is what we would need to properly address what had the county deserves in terms of road infrastructure and footpath infrastructure and line marking. So what the engineers attempt to do every year is a programme of works, that is discussed at municipal level, with what we can do with the very, very limited resources that we do have.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just while we're on the subject of footpaths, I am going to take on board everything that the members have said. For a while here over a number of years IPB used to give us funding to go towards footpath repairs where there were blackspots in regards to accidents. The head of finance has informed me in recent days that this is no longer funding that is available to us. And again I would ask the question, why not? Do the Irish Public Bodies -- the insurer of all local authorities, and it is in their interests that there is no trip hazards, there is no areas where people are continually falling and putting in claims. And again, we must take on board in regards to this discussion the 6 million that is there to be assessed and where it goes. And as I said to our own municipal district engineer last week, he's a new engineer to our district, that we have the utmost faith in our engineers, they're the ones that are qualified, but we also have to take on board what the public are saying to us. And you don't need to be an engineer to know where there's a footpath that is in dire need of remediation works, repairs. And the truth is that all too often all we're hearing back from the top table is, well, you had the option of increasing the Local Property Tax. And it's getting a little bit patronising at this stage. The money is there and it must be spent. We're not, Chief Executive, saying that we can repair every single footpath in County Wicklow here and now over the next 12 months. It's not possible. And we know that. But we're only trying to assist our district engineers in identifying the ones that are in most urgent need of repair. And when we go back to the public and say the there is no money, and it doesn't matter what time of the year, whether it be January, whether it

be June or November, there is no money for that, it's very frustrating to come down here and spend hours upon hours sitting here going over a budget meeting to raise those concerns. And many members have, and leaving all political allegiance to one side, that's our responsibility; to make sure that things that are brought to our attention are brought into this chamber here, such as footpaths that need repair. And it's too simplistic to say we don't have the funding, it would cost millions upon millions, yet the Government give us funding for what they termed connectivity. So let's put a footpath in from Rathnew to Glenealy which is over two miles long, let's do that, it was most welcomed, it was brilliant, and it did create the connectivity, because the funding was there after the Covid pandemic. But now what you have is a two-mile long footpath that I need not come in here and say there's a problem on it because we haven't the funding to address it. And unfortunately in every one of our districts, north, east, south and west, there's footpaths where they are trip hazards, there is people falling, and yet we're finding it difficult to get those issues addressed. So we're not here playing party politics, we're only here -- we're trying to work with people at the top table to address these issues. So when a suggestion is made that can we look at the 6 million and address it, we understand we have roads engineers, we understand we have local engineers who are identifying projects, but when the Elected Members bring them to the attention can we not just give the old cliché, the old line that we don't have funding, can we at least look at it and say, yes, there's 6 million there and we need to address the most urgent, irrespective of who brings it to the table. Doesn't matter to me whether it is an engineer, or another councillor or member of the public. A trip hazard is addressed and the funding is there we should do it. Thanks, Chief Executive.

MS O'GORMAN: Members, I did say that the 6 million is allocated based on need, based on safety and other concerns. If there are particular issues they are raised at a municipal level and in this chamber, and it has been the singular most discussed item in this chamber the last six months by far. What I am saying is, 6 million will not cover everything we have. The road engineers are qualified to make those assessments, they do so in conjunction with the members. And that is what I accept. I am not saying we don't have money. We have some money but it is done on a safety analysis, on where is the most need. It would be desirable to repair footpaths all around the county and potholes all around the county but we have to do it in a

programmed way where it is by most need and safety reasons. That's how we prioritise.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: To me it sounds like Councillor Stapleton has a proposal, so I would love to hear the wording of that, if there's a proposal that's to be decided upon in terms of footpaths and allocations. And beyond that, there is a challenge there and I appreciate what the Chief Executive is saying, but again if we are dropping down the menu, footpaths is health and safety, but footpaths are tourism, footpaths are climate action, footpaths are also active travel. But yeah, I'm curious if there's a concrete proposal that it be brought to the floor. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Just before I invite Councillor Stapleton in, because I do appreciate it's your first budget, I am going to get Brian to come in first and then if you want to make a proposal, so you get the full facts.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: I was going to ask for help.

MR GLEESON: The members are entitled to make proposals for adjustments within the budget but I suppose any increase in one area has to be offset by a decrease elsewhere. As has been pointed out, we put forward 12 million of our own resources in the roads, 6 million for pay, so that's unavailable. The other 6 million as the Chief Executive has outlined is for priority areas based on health and safety. So if you're going to increase or put forward a new budget line for footpath repairs you will have to reduce areas that will impact on road surfacing works that have been identified by the district engineers as key, pothole repairs, gritting expenditure. So that's what we're looking at, you know. I don't know what amount of money you're talking about, but that's the impact it's going to have an impact locally.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Again, look, I know that's tough politically but it is something I am willing to do given that we've had -- it's been the biggest item discussed here since I have come to the chamber, and I would ask that actually we don't take it out of the roads and maintenance budget but we find -- the Chief Executive has talked about it being such a big project that, you know, it's scary that we wouldn't have all the funding but I think it is important that we make a start and we say that actually as councillors we're doing something towards it. So I propose that we have a €1 million expenditure line item for footpaths throughout the county that we find from other areas, taking 100,000, 200,000 from those other areas where we have discretionary spend, like the 2 million on parks, open spaces and pitches,

like the 2 million on street cleaning, like the 2 million on all of those area areas. As I said, there's no point in you coming to clean the streets in Carnew when they're in absolute tatters.

MS O'GORMAN: In your proposal you have to set out line-by-line where you're going to take that expenditure from and I suppose if that is agreed by the members here that has impact on all other service areas. So to create a new line of expenditure, 1 million, and you're saying take it out of parks, the other most common thing that we talked about here is our recreation spaces for our young people, you know. So I think you need -- it's completely up to the members but in terms of a written proposal to change the budget you have to identify each line item that you're going to change to reduce to create that new line item. The budget has to be balanced.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Give me a second there.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay.

MS O'GORMAN: You can come back and we can continue on with our discussions.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Perfect. I will run it by some of the members.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay.

MR GLEESON: Cathaoirleach, can I make point as well obviously there are certain areas that are pay-related, obviously they can't be touched.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yes, yes.

MR GLEESON: So put forward a proposal. I will make the point that during the discussions with the CPG we were looking at a stage where we're going to have to increase commercial rates, we thought we were going to have to because it was so difficult to try and balance the budget. So we have gone through line-by-line, you know, 1,600 expenditure lines we have gone through that in order to try and avoid increasing our commercial rates which we were successful in doing. So it's not like there's a load of fat out there. Just to be aware the implications of a million euro is a huge amount of money within this budget given that, as I said, the level of discretionary expenditure that we have is very minimal. So just to be conscious of that, you know. There's not any fat really out there. So you would be making cuts to services that will have a direct negative impact within local societies. Okay. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I just say before I invite Councillor Scott in, just when you're going through -- Councillor Stapleton, in terms of parks, I know Councillor Dunne is online here, and over the last five years he has spoken very passionately about our open parks and the need for a team and our playgrounds. I would just caution on that. Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I wasn't going to speak on this line item but I would just urge Councillor Stapleton, while he has made excellent contributions, and I really welcome here this morning, just to proceed with caution. And again, the reference to parks spurred me to speak. I know from previous years when I chaired the climate CPG and sitting on CPG, an awful lot of work goes on behind the scenes in consultation with the members and the Executive, and with Brian, as to where the line items go, where the money goes. And I know I queried previous years, trying to direct money into parks actually. And parks and open spaces is an area that needs a full department let alone to be taking money from it. I would just say that if any changes are being proposed by any of the Elected Members to take money from one service area to put it into another we all have the same issues. Lack of line markings and lack of footpaths, et cetera. I would say proceed with caution, and that people don't make a hasty judgment or hastily vote in a knee-jerk reaction here today. We don't want to be sitting here today in eight months' time with issues.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Erika Doyle.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, I would just like to request as well from Councillor Stapleton a detailed examination of exactly where the priority areas be for that million euro, where would they be spent, where exactly they would be taken from, both departmentally and location-wise as well because this is going to have implications obviously for some areas more than others. So, where are those priority areas? Like, I think this is actually a body of work. I don't think this is something that can be flung together in a chamber, you know, coming from a notion. While I do respect where Councillor Stapleton is coming from, it is something we all discuss all the time. Similarly to Councillor Scott, my flag went up when I am hearing about money being taken from parks, from open spaces that are free and accessible to all. So I think we need to be really, really careful. While the headline of this does sound good I think we need to look at the detail and, as I said, just to see exactly where would that be spent and where would it come from and

what we're taking money from, who are we taking money from, what areas are we taking money from, who is losing out here. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Just a quick observation, Chair. I think this -- I know the effort and the work that Brian has put into coming up with what has been presented to us, the to-ing and fro-ing that has been done to make it work. The situation we have now based on Councillor Stapleton's proposal puts in good context the example I was trying to explain when I was talking. It just shows the dilemma we have. With the best will in the world we can put something forward but the implications of putting something forward means we have to regurgitate the whole budget. And because the budget, as I see it, is totally prescriptive that is I think where the problem is. I really believe 110 percent unless we can come with a way of approaching the budget differently and get help from the Department on it this is going to get worse and worse and worse. Some people mightn't like to hear that. That is my observation of the budget and I have been listening for a long time. And I have looked at the budget and I know the work that's gone into it; it's a big job to change it at this late stage.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I think we're all in agreement that the process isn't perfect but we've also had two CPG meetings where, Councillor Fortune, you made a valuable contribution at those CPG meetings, as did everybody else, plus the fact too we have been reminded on several occasions that we did receive the budget ten days ago and we have had a chance in them ten days to have an input and to come to Brian and the Chief Executive, not just arrive here on the day to change it. So while we do appreciate your consideration here today I think we just also have to deal with what we find ourselves in. Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Just to make the point that a lot has been mentioned in regards to the CPG and the Corporate Policy Group, and I do have to point out that only the chairs of the various SPCs attend the CPG, as is par for the course, as is set down in legislation. So, therefore, six of the 32 members here are privy to those meetings with senior management through the CPG. So I think, I understand, I sat there long enough, and I realise that you do have the opportunity. So while you say that, Cathaoirleach, in regards to the 32 members you yourself along with five others within the chambers as Elected Members have had those extra meetings with the top table there, and I do think if the meetings of the CPG, while I understand the minutes

will not be signed off or whatever, if they could have been sent out or we could have had a workshop in regards to this budget it might have been more helpful, but it isn't fair to say that we have had ample opportunity. Yes, we have had ten days to go through it, but a lot of new members here, a lot of newly elected members, who are only in the chambers a number of months, some of them are very lucky to be chairs of SPCs which means they have sat at Corporate Policy Group meetings and had the opportunity to go through two previous meetings, but that isn't true for every other member in the chambers. And whilst some of us have been here a long, long time there is others who are trying to get their head around this process and I think we have to be fair to them and just say that they weren't privy to the Corporate Policy Group meetings.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I am not getting into a to and fro here but I just want to clarify my second point here, that Brian has an open-door policy and just because we have had two CPG meetings whether it is something that we all inherited, I inherited it, and there have been people sitting on the CPGs in here a lot longer than I have, and I have never heard a proposal to change from any of them coming forward. So to come here today and say that the process is flawed, you're right, but why didn't they do about it on that CPG? In terms of going back to Brian's open-door policy, you know it's not just the ten days we have had to digest the budget, you could have come to him at any time to discuss it. I have worked with Brian for the last five and a half years now and I know he is always, always welcoming councillors in to discuss it.

Councillor Stapleton?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yeah. I appreciate all the councillors' support, advice and patience with me, I am kind of losing the plot here on my first budget day. I think the point I made with calling out the different line items that we could look at to draw funds away from towards a footpath fund was to say that there are lots of line items there that we have in our discretion. And so, this is not the proposal first but just an ask, that I know the budget has been prepared in a prescribed way but that for next year's budget, and I would like to have it on the record, that we have a list of all those exact items of where the discretion we have over the spending.

And then for my proposal what I would like to put forward myself is that we ask the Council to report back with a report on the state of the footpaths throughout the county identifying footpaths that require full replacement and a commitment to draw down a €1 million seed fund from development levy to begin the capital replacement of these footpaths.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you very much, Councillor Stapleton. Yeah, as I mentioned, we are beginning the process of looking at the footpaths and preparing a report on that basis. And your contribution is very timely because we do want to look at the development levies and how they are apportioned to the different programme groups. So, yeah, happy to take that proposal.

COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: I am happy to second that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We have a proposer and seconder.

MS PURCELL: Can I have it in writing?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Lourda Scott, do you want to come back? Okay. Councillor Silvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: No, it's okay, I was going to say I blame Joe Behan.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just on a point of order. I sit on the CPG, as my colleague here, Graham Richmond, does, and both of us have gone back to our groupings and discussed what we discussed at the CPG and all the implications and anything, and given the group the opportunity to come back with any other questions. And I just think that is the way it should be done in all groups. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Brian, do you want to come back in there?

MR GLEESON: Yeah, I was going to make that point that Councillor Corrigan had said in relation to, I suppose, it's the responsibility of people coming back to their groups. But also, I did have an opportunity at each of the MD meetings when I went out to discuss the draft budgetary plan, we didn't just talk about the draft budgetary plan, there was an opportunity for people to raise different issues about the finances. So that was an opportunity for me to take on board issues that people had in relation to the finances. But, look, going forward next year, I have no problem doing a separate workshop for all members outside of the CPG if that would assist the process. Obviously per legislation it is the CPG that has the authority and the power

to actually provide instruction and direction in relation to the way the budget is put together, but if an information session separately around that same time would be helpful for the members I have no problem putting that on, okay, with the list of discretionary items. And then obviously what comes out of that workshop could be fed back into the CPG. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. Just while we are waiting there, Councillor Stapleton, you're going to put that in writing, okay?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: What I should have said then is everyone agreed? No dissent? So we can take that then. Once we get it in writing it is agreed upon.

If can I just remind people we are still on roads and housing. Councillor Snell, you're on.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just in regards to, it was mentioned there about it being a flawed system. I don't believe anyone says it is a flawed system. You know, the system is the system that's there for everyone to abide by. I think rushing and hustling through the whole process isn't helpful. But I know I certainly didn't say it is a flawed system and I didn't hear any of my colleagues saying it is a flawed system. It was to highlight the shortcomings of people who weren't at CPG. And I did explain that through legislation that is how people sit at the table of CPG. But I didn't say it as flawed system. And you said, Cathaoirleach, that people are saying it is a flawed system. I certainly didn't say it is a flawed system. I am open to you correcting yourself.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No, I stand over what I said. I am entitled to my opinion. And if the word I used was flawed and other people are using different words, so be it. We're entitled to our opinion. If you want me to change the terminology and say it is not a perfect system, that's where we are. But what we're not going to do here today is we're not going to sit here and score political points against each other when we have a budget to pass. We're still on housing and roads. We have other sections here. So I just want to move on. I want to get a budget done so I do, so...

Councillor Snell, is it in relation to roads?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: No, actually. No. No. It's not. It's just, you can use what terminology you want, you said that it was mentioned that it was a flawed system, so

you were saying that somebody else in the chamber was saying that it is a flawed system.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell, we have a job to do. If you want to keep going down this avenue you can keep going down it. I am just not going to entertain it. And I am not letting you in. We're going to keep going because at the end of the day we have a job to do here, we get paid to do it. It is not a perfect system. If you want me to change the terminology, no problem. We have a job to do. I'm going to get it done today.

If everyone is finished with housing and roads now? Okay. The next section we have to do is water services and development management. I will open up the floor. Brian.

MR GLEESON: So we're doing three divisions together: Division C, water services, that's on page 68 and 83 to 84, and that covers expenditure of 6.5 million and income of 5.7 million; division D, development management, on pages 69 and 85 to 87, and covering expenditure of 20.6 million and income of 10.2; and finally, division E, environmental services on page 70 and 88 to 90, covering expenditure of 20.4 million and income of 5.2 million. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. I will open up to the floor there again. Anyone online? Okay. Okay, Brian -- sorry, Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. It is not a specific figure item, but it is an item. We have all got an email relevant to development management. We got an email from the residents close to the Ballinclare Quarry. We received it just before 11 o'clock. And it has implications for the Chief Executive and the management of this Council, and I cannot, cannot let this meeting pass without asking the Chief Executive if she is aware of the fact that Kilsaran have submitted an application to An Bord Pleanála under strategic infrastructure development proposal for the Ballinclare Quarry? Okay. But they've submitted minutes of meetings with employees of this Council from the roads section and the environment section, where they're stating that in the case of the roads section two roads officials have indicated that they accept there will be additional hazards on the roads system around the quarry if the development goes through, and there is kind of I suppose a situation where they might improve the roads but they might also be increasing the traffic, but even more importantly, two representatives or two employees of this Council from

the environment section have indicated that Wicklow County Council are going to support this application. Now, these are in the minutes of the submission that Kilsaran are making. Can I ask the Chief Executive is she aware of this? Because we did discuss this very issue about how we as a council are going to respond to this application. It's gone in at a time now we're coming up to Christmas, okay, the public submissions have to be in by the 9th January and the officials of the Council have to have submissions by the end of January. In the past we, the members, have had one day's notice before we made a submission on this. And what the concern of the local people is, is these are preplanned, these are meetings held with officials before the planning authority went in, just to clarify. The people are concerned that there is asbestos dust in the air around that area. That asbestos is being disturbed as a result of work that is ongoing. We got an email response from the EPA through Helen Purcell last week which indicated the EPA are saying we, Wicklow County Council, are responsible for monitoring what is going on there. The residents are asking quite clearly for all work to stop, and they are also asking for an independent report to be done on the possible movement of asbestos in that area particularly for people who live near it. But like I took on face value what the Chief Executive said about this a month ago, where Wicklow County Council were going to reflect the views of the members, and at that point in time she did not indicate that Wicklow County Council were going to be supporting this application, but someone employed by Wicklow County Council is indicating that's going to happen. So we're discussing the budget, yes, and there'll be an opportunity next week, yes, but every minute and every day counts with regards to the people who live there, and I believe myself whatever work is going on there should be stopped until a full investigation takes place, and I am asking that that be done on behalf of those residents and public representatives who attended meetings there in recent weeks. But I would certainly welcome any light that the Chief Executive can throw on this.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Chief Executive.

MS O'GORMAN: Yes, thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you for raising the matter, Councillor Behan. Yes, we are aware of the application being made and like any other application they are entitled to preplanning through various sections here in the Council, which has happened. What has not happened, no report has issued from this Council to An Bord Pleanála.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I didn't say that.

MS O'GORMAN: I am being very clear in what I am saying.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I didn't say that.
MS O'GORMAN: I know you didn't. I am telling you what the process is. A report will issue from this local authority having been before the members here. This local authority has not issued any opinion on the matter to An Bord Pleanála or any other body in relation to being in favour, or otherwise, of the proposal. We are required to make a submission which we will do before 31st January. So it will come before the members in January when the staff have prepared the report and it will come to the members at our January meeting for the members to consider and contribute as what we had agreed previously and what we have stated previously, what I had stated previously we would do. I wasn't aware of the particular meetings or that they had submitted minutes to the board, but the Council has not formed its opinion, as in, the Executive has not formed its opinion, the Chief Executive's Report has not been made on the opinion. And it will come before the members before it is submitted to the board and the members will absolutely have their input into that.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Behan.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Okay. But what will the Chief Executive do if -- Kilsaran are claiming that employees of this body are saying we're going to support it. Can the Chief Executive do anything about that, firstly? Secondly, what about work continuing if people have a major concern about this and the EPA are saying it is up to us to look after this situation, monitor it, inspect it? And thirdly, the appointment of an independent consultant on behalf of the public to check whether their concerns are verified. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.
MS O'GORMAN: Yeah, I will certainly look into the matter with regards to any opinion given by staff is not the official report of the Council. If they have reported that to the board, that is not the Council's position. The Council's position will be through the Chief Executive's Report which will come through this chamber. In terms of the work or whatever is ongoing, if you want to send on to me the -- we haven't got that complaint from the residents, but the correspondence you just mentioned there, that you got before 11 o'clock this morning, we will certainly look at that, get our staff in environmental services to look at it.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: They have already made planning enforcement complaints to this council.

MS O'GORMAN: Yes, I know that. The most recent complaint we will look into that and examine it and I will come back to the members in the meantime.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I will send that on to you in the meantime.
MS O'GORMAN: Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Snell.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just in regards to income and water services, there's a reduction there of €120,093. I assume like some of that income would come from Irish Water using the office space within this local authority, in this building. And just to get a breakdown on why there's a reduction of 120,000. Now, I know not all the money is coming from Irish Water but just to get a breakdown on that and why there's a reduction of 120,000 year-on-year. And just in regards to expenditure, water supply under CO199, there's a reduction there as well. Well, water plants and networks, it says €41,039, but the service costs are 2.7 million. It still a reduction overall from 2.9 million, down to 2.8 million, but if we could just have some level of information in regards to that; what does it entail, and are Wicklow County Council as the local authority still responsible for a number of these networks throughout the county? And Irish Water are not responsible for them? But still 2.8 million, as I say, it is a reduction for water supply down from 2.9 million. And then we have a reduction on income. So, that's on water.

Just in regards to development management, year-on-year obviously enforcement is a big part of what any local authority's responsibility are, and Wicklow are no different from other local authorities, they take their responsibility very seriously. Development levies, the development management, the enforcement costs, 744,000, service supports, 425, brings you to a total of 1.1 million in regards to enforcement. Could I ask -- and I know, Chief Executive, I don't want to put you on the spot and I know you're probably turning your eyes to heaven now at this stage because of the level of questions, but can I ask you where in regards to enforcement? Because a lot of enforcement deal with the law agency, deal with court cases, deal with, you know, solicitors' letters; we have our law agent and her department looking after this. Where is those figures in regards to this? Because I assume they're not incorporated into that 1.1 million because enforcement is only telling us enforcement costs and service support costs. So I assume that's wages. So where would I find in this budget in general the fees that it costs this local authority to run the law section and

is that broken down into court cases and other important works that the law agent does? Because I don't believe that is an overall reflective cost of enforcement costs particularly when the vast majority of enforcement is legal. I think it is a fair question, and I hope I am not annoying the top table, but unfortunately I am here to represent the people who elected me, and I will keep the questions as long as they keep asking me.

In regards to tourism. The tourism budget has increased this year, increased from 746,000 to 810,000. And we see the breakdown there in regards to tourism development and promotion DO5. In years gone by when the tourism officer wasn't employed directly by the local authority you could set your watch by a presentation, the meeting before the budget meeting where the tourism officer would be brought in to give a presentation and really come cap in hand looking for extra money to go into the budget. The tourism officer I believe is directly employed by the local authority now and it is just to get a breakdown in regards to, we have tourism promotion, tourism facilities and service support costs, 810,000. It's increased from 746,000.

If I could ask just in regards to DO6, community and enterprise function. And we have under DO603 social inclusion. There's a massive reduction in regards to social inclusion, a massive reduction from 7.5 -- or 5.7 million down to 5.4. And it's a reduction of over a quarter of a million euros. Can we have more detail around what's incorporated in this social inclusion at this time in our history? And everyone's well aware with regards to social inclusion and the importance of social inclusion. I just find it baffling that it's a massive chunk of money, it's a quarter of a million euros that we're reducing from the social inclusion budget. So if I could have a breakdown of why we feel we don't have to put that extra quarter of a million into that and what exactly is that being spent on, that 5.7 million last year. Because it was an estimated outturn of 6.2 in 2024, but it was adopted at the Council at 5.7. I just see now that it's estimated that 5.4. Is that suddenly going to go to 5.1 and then next year it'll be 4.8 and... I just don't know enough around why there's such a reduction in that sector.

In regards to building control, DO8. Again building control, there's a reduction of 29,900. It's quite a small budget for building control at a time when building is at an

all-time high. So overall it's 385,478 in 2024, we're reducing it to 355,578. My understanding is that the building control operated through this local authority are personnel based in Bray, but I am open to correction and I would love clarification around that. Why are we reducing building control when we actually have more building than we ever had in the county? And again, without having further information it's very hard to grasp why that's been reduced. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

MS O'GORMAN: Just very quickly, Councillor Snell, before I hand over to Brian, on the law department and the planning enforcement. People like the law agent or myself, or any of the staff, our salaries are apportioned across depending on the level of work done in a particular area. So a good portion of the law department salaries are part of the enforcement costs so that they are included in that general enforcement code. Other than that, they are spread across the central management charge. Again HR, law department, IT services go across every service area. But anything that is directly attributed to planning enforcement gets charged on planning enforcement. Just on the building control, again that's salaries. Again the building control officers, they are salaried staff, they're based within the fire service, or in that area, and they are based in the Bray office. So it is not a reduction in service, it is just a reapportionment of salary costs. So the activity level has not dropped at all. In fact, they have never been busier.

Brian might deal with the rest of your queries. Thank you.

MR GLEESON: Just in relation to water. I suppose the expenditure has gone down and the income has gone down because we're in the process of transitioning to Irish Water. So some staff have actually moved across to Irish Water. So the once that have transferred obviously they're no longer members of Wicklow County Council and Uisce Eireann are paying them directly. I suppose we get income now for two elements. Since September 2023 Uisce Eireann have responsibility for the operation of water services throughout the county. We have a support service agreement in place with Uisce Eireann in relation to that. They pay for the staff that are directly working on water services. The CMC charges which would, as outlined, cover all the other areas such as IT support, HR accommodation and so forth, that is now being paid by the Department directly rather than previously it would have been

from Uisce Eireann. So that's the change there. So basically the reduction in income and expenditure relates to staff that have transferred to Uisce Eireann.

I think in relation to enforcement, as the Chief Executive said, the part of that relates to support services which would be the central management charges 425,000, of the remaining 744 figure that's in the book the bulk of that, nearly 600,000, relates to staff salaries. There is a small element of legal fees of 50,000 earmarked for enforcement, but obviously on top of that we would have the cost of our legal department. The legal department in totality is about, between support services, it's about 890,000, the cost -- and that's apportioned across all services as part of the CMC process.

With regard to tourism. I am just trying to work a spreadsheet here to get to the detail. Look, we have a number of --

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Do you want my printout?

MR GLEESON: We have the County Wicklow Film Commission that does a lot of work promoting films within Wicklow. There was an increase there of about 16,000. Increases for Bray Tourism, County Wicklow Tourism, a general increase of about 20,000 for tourism promotion. Obviously that would be for Fred to develop initiatives going forward next year. Obviously we wouldn't have breakdowns at this stage. That would be part of his annual proposal for next year.

I think in relation to building control costs, as the Chief Executive said, the bulk of that or 99% of that is staff salaries. There's a small reduction in staff salaries. If there was a movement of staff, depending on where they are in the pay point, they might have been replaced by someone who is at a lower point on the pay scale. And also, the support services costs has reduced from 109,000 down to 89,000 and that's just the central management charges, the way they are apportioned. It's all, the central management charges, there's an explanation in the budget book how it's apportioned out and they can vary from year to year and from service to service. So that's why there's a variation there. I think that's all the points that were raised.

Sorry, the social inclusion, yeah. That covers areas such as SICAP, Leader, the Ukraine response. I suppose the big drop there is we had a leader provision of 1.5

million, that's how 800,000. If we get more funding throughout the year, obviously it is a contra entry; the expenditure will go up and income will go up. But that's the allocation we have at the moment so that is all we can put in the budget book. Also our Ukraine response is being reduced as well. I think ultimately the plan is to move that cost over to the relevant Department of Health, IPAS and others to take that on board. But we have noticed people moving out. What we have at the moment is contracts in place for hotels and accommodation providers, as people move out and get their own accommodation or move back to Ukraine or so forth obviously those costs have been reduced as well. So that's the explanation there. But it's mainly in relation to the leader allocation. But, as I say, that is the initial allocation, that can be adjusted going forward. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Just a quick one, on page 5, table 5, division D, there is the formatting -- so before this might get uploaded there's a formatting error where the headings are out of sync with the details on each one.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Point noted. Any other questions? John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, and thanks for the clarification. Just in regards to the community and enterprise function. Thanks for the clarification in relation to social inclusion. There's a huge increase in regards to the service support costs. Is there further people employed within that section, that's gone from 679,000 up to 841,000? As I say, overall in regards social inclusion reduced by 250,000. Is there further people employed there? Why such a jump from that? The Chief Executive has explained in regards to the, you know, service support costs being reduced from 109,000 to 89,000, 20,000 reduction, and you've explained that, Brian, yourself in regards to how it's proportioned. Again it is something that maybe going into budget 2025 for those that are present maybe we could have something prior to the budget that could explain how that's worked. That's only something that the likes of Peter Stapleton, Edward Timmins, Mary Kavanagh who was here before us, all had a background in finance, would fully understand.

Again just in regards to the legal fees, and how they're proportioned across all the sections, thanks for clarifying that, but I would like to see -- and I'm not looking for it for this budget, but maybe at some stage after the budget is passed, the budget will be passed today, that we have a breakdown on the legal fees across each sector,

whether it be development management, roads, housing, if the budget is 2 million, where it's were portioned. Because you proportion it. So it wouldn't be a big deal to bring it up and print it out and show us. But certainly for budget 2026 I suppose it would be, it should be a one-page item in regards to just showing where the -- and the reason for that, Emer, is, before you came to Wicklow, and indeed before Frank Curran, your predecessor, came to Wicklow, we had a lot of court cases outstanding in this county, we had a lot of fees attached to those court cases, we had a lot of questions asked in the chambers going on over 15, 16 years, and it's just to highlight the fact. Because I think it is a huge step forward, the law section. They uphold the law, whether it be planning law or other law, and that's what we want. But we do have to answer to the public. And handing this document or emailing that or otherwise I cannot gander the information I need from the law section to pass that on to the public who I represent. And that's all I am asking, that it should be a one-page item on the back of budget 2026. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Silvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just on page 61 there, in relation to the Arklow Municipal District objectives proposed for 2025, given that we are going live with the commissioning of the sewage treatment works very soon and the first item there, the promotion of economic development within the Arklow Municipal District, I really think that should be pushed really hard and expanded as soon as possible because there's huge opportunities out there for us in Arklow, and we don't want to let the grass grow under our feet and anything that we can do to bring forward and accelerate a plan would be gratefully received.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Brian.

MR GLEESON: Just on the community and that whole area, D6. There was additional staff in community but also the new integration team that's been put forward as well, there's about 300,000 of an additional cost for that team, and it's fully funded by the relevant department in that regard. I think there's about -- how many staff, Marc, is there? Four in the integration team? Four.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: On a point of clarification. Just in regards to the four staff, are they direct employees of Wicklow County Council now?

MS O'GORMAN: Yeah, just to confirm, yeah. So the Department, the Department of Community Youth Integration, have funded, fully funded in every local authority at least four additional members of staff to deal with the community integration, to

deal with Ukrainian as well as international protection, the whole gamut I suppose, yeah.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: And would it be possible in regards to, again not for today because it's more of a rolling out of the roles and functions and maybe just details in regards to who they are for the contact in regards that.

MS O'GORMAN: Yes. Marc will --

COUNCILLOR SNELL: And again, their employment status, should the integration process not be needed in four or six years' time they will still be employees?

MS O'GORMAN: No, they're on temporary contracts. So it is contracts of fixed duration at the moment. All posts that are funded through the various different departments are generally different contracts.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Wow. No security in that unfortunately.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. No one has any other questions in relation to that topic. If everyone is happy enough to keep going? Okay. I can feel the energy in the room.

MR GLEESON: We're nearly there, folks. We're coming around the bend. The last grouping that we want to look at is division F, recreation amenity. That can be found on pages 71 and 91 to 92. Expenditure of 13 million, income of 1.3 million. Division G, agriculture, education, health and welfare, pages 72, 93 to 94. Expenditure of 2.7, income 1.1 million. And then finally, division H, miscellaneous services, on page 73 and pages 95 to 97, and that's expenditure of 12 million and income of 16.5 million. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Brian. Councillor Peter Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Just looking for clarity on what H11, there's estimated income of 13.8 million, again agency in recoupable services, just what that entails. It goes against expenditure of 1.4 million.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Does anyone else want to come in here while the floor is open? Brian, do you want to answer that then?

MR GLEESON: Sorry, that was H11. The income, is it?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yes.

MR GLEESON: The income. We have, sorry, H11, the whole lot, is it?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Yeah.

MR GLEESON: 16.5. The most of it would be ten, about 11 million would be paid compensation for all the pay increases over the last number of years. It's a cumulative payment. We've had it, it's going back, like, six or seven years, whatever.

It's added on. I think we got an extra 2 plus million this year. So the cumulative amount is 11 million. There's a payment from social protection just over 100,000, that would be sick and maternity leave benefit recoupment. Superannuation costs. The NPPR, 50,000. Other income makes up the bulk of the rest and that'd be our investment income, the machinery yard, that's kind of a charging mechanism whereby we purchase vehicles and we charge out the usage to the municipal districts and the income is brought in that way. Our IPB dividends and also our new commercial rates properties, there's a figure of about 500,000 that we include in that particular area. That's probably an overview of what's in it rather than going into every line item.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: It was just the increase in salary, I didn't know what that was.

MR GLEESON: Yes, okay.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I was just disappointed to see there was no increase in funding to the Mermaid Arts Centre. The Mermaid, as we know, is a charity based in Bray but it is the County Wicklow Arts Centre, delivering programmes across Wicklow in the library network and in the schools, yarn events which have been in Laragh, Roundwood, Glenmalure, also out in Baltinglass. The building itself is 22 years old, requiring ongoing maintenance and investment, and it is currently maxed out on potential of box office sales and limited in space and number of performances. It would have benefited hugely by an increase in the money that receives from Wicklow County Council, of which it is very grateful, but I would just like to see it is looked at for next year. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian.

MR GLEESON: Yeah, I will make a point that it got a substantial increase a couple of years ago, I think 20,000, 30,000. It is receiving at the moment 361,000 which is a significant amount of funding. We did receive a request but it was -- it didn't actually look for a particular amount or an increase by percentage, it was just a general submission. But, look, we will take that on board in relation to next year's budget. Maybe we can discuss it in more detail with the relevant body. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you want to come back in there, Councillor Corrigan, or are you happy enough with it? You're happy enough with it. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I don't know if it is a question that can be answered. Can we get a flavour of where the investment income is coming from? Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I keep going? Because I have Councillor Jason Mulhall.

COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just a request on page number 62 for the Baltinglass MD activities, if we could include in there a line on providing assistance and support to the various Tidy Towns committees in the district.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. Brian, do you want to take the two?

MR GLEESON: Yes. Just on the Tidy Towns. In the general municipal allocation that's provided to the districts under economic development. There is provision for Tidy Towns allocations there, and I know a number of municipal districts do supplement that provision from the discretionary fund. So that seems to be the standard approach throughout the county.

In relation to investment income, councillor. That's basically, development levies would be the main source of funding. So we have our levies. We have our capital plan to spend the levies. Obviously it does take time, you know, especially in relation to large roads programmes, you know the amount of reports that have to be done, the planning and so forth. So at the moment we have put as much money as we can that we don't need to spend on a day-to-day basis away into investment to generate some income while we're in that favourable position at the moment. But I suppose that money in time will be spent. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Members, if everyone is happy enough we will go on to the next -- I nearly got away with it. Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: It just reminded me, and maybe we can ask at the end. In his initial presentation you mentioned that one of the extra items of income was additional income from investment. Can I ask you, first of all, what was the figure again?

MR GLEESON: I think it was 350,000 or 375,000.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: 375,000.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: That was additional income you weren't expecting.

MR GLEESON: Additional income, yeah. No, well, we are estimating. This is for next year.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Okay
MR GLEESON: We're estimating that we will bring in additional amount of that.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Did that form part of your calculation when you were working out the property tax?
MR GLEESON: It would have been available at that stage, yeah.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: So you included that figure in your calculations, did you, before you went to the members?
MR GLEESON: Before I went to the members, absolutely, yeah.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Okay, thank you.
MR GLEESON: Is there an issue?
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: No. I thought there might have been. But you don't think there is.
MR GLEESON: You're too suspicious, councillor.
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I'm not suspicious enough.
CATHAOIRLEACH: I will keep going. Councillor Snell.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, thanks, Cathaoirleach. Yeah, again, environmental section. Just in regards to recovery and the recycling facilities. We were talking here not too long ago about the upgrade of a number of recycling centres throughout the county. We had various presentations and yet there's only a very small increase within the budget for the operations of the facilities in regards to whether it be recycling facilities or otherwise. So it's 22,000 is the increase. So is all the upgrade works that was proposed here for the recycling centres, is that all on hold now? Is it gone? Are we seeking the separate funding from central government? Or what is the story on that? Because it did take up a lot of time and there were very good presentations that were outlined to the members and indeed it covered a number of our municipal districts in regards to the services that's been provided, and we had a whole conversation about whether we incur charges for the general public or otherwise. But I don't see anything in this that suggests to me that you're going to upgrade the facilities in 2025. And it's just to get clarification around that.

In regards to litter management, and again I am sure there's a perfect explanation for it, but it just says under E07501, litter warden services. There's actually no charges down for it, last year or this year. And it's just to give me some indication of why that would be when certainly at municipal district level I'm sure every councillor in

the chambers would have brought up about litter control within their own areas, whether it be dog fouling or litter in general.

In regards to maintenance of burial grounds, it's actually a reduction on last year. Quite small, I accept, but still a reduction all the same. When at a time that the maintenance of our burial grounds are increasing by the very nature that we have a number of graveyards throughout the county which need extensions. Some have taken in extra ground and yet we don't seem to be alleviating for this body of works. Something that I brought up on a couple of occasions here was money to be set aside for the maintenance of old graveyards. And I am hoping that it's somewhere in the figures here in regards to environmental services. Old graveyards are graveyards, as you know, which unfortunately are no longer used but they're still burial grounds of family members of those who went before us whether, it be three or four generations away, really important for our historians and people who gather up the archives of what went before. We have small community groups throughout the county who look after graveyards across Wicklow and a lot of them are small community groups similar to our Tidy Towns, to our residents associations and they're out there trying to maintain old cemeteries, in some cases you know it's an awful lot of work and they're fundraising themselves or they're paying for petrol and oil and running the lawnmowers. And we did mention here that this would be looked at in this budget and I am hoping that under environmental services that it could be incorporated and is incorporated here, because if it's not I would be looking and calling that there be a budget set aside for that. But whether it is managed through our heritage officer or through our environmental section, either or it should be in there.

In regards to E12, fire prevention. And again I'm sure there's a perfect explanation for it, and perhaps the funding is coming through the fire services themselves, I don't know, or some other outside agency. But fire prevention and education, last year there was no funding, this year and again maybe, Chief Executive, you'd be able to explain why that is.

At a time when we talk about climate change and flooding it's nice to see that there's an increase of almost a half million euros in regards to climate change and flooding. Can I have some breakdown in regards to E1501, climate change and flooding,

€1,956,631, that has been put aside for the year ahead? Unless you're on the SPC you won't be fully aware of what's entailed in that, and I think as all 32 members maybe we could have some clarification. But I welcome the extra funding and I do know that a large body of works has been undertaken by the staff to identify flood risk areas within local area plans and indeed within our County Development Plan that was passed here in recent years. Just to get some level of information around that, please.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Avril Cronin.

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Thanks. I will be very brief. Following on from Councillor Mulhall's proposal. All the other municipal districts have it down as an objective, and I think it would be no harm having it as an objective in the Baltinglass Municipal District as well. The Tidy Towns groups do a lot of work in our towns and villages that other local authorities are able to do themselves. So we do rely an awful lot on our volunteers and on our community. So I would be happy to support his proposal.

MS O'GORMAN: That is no problem, councillor. It is oversight and we ensure it goes into the Baltinglass MD description.

In relation to the recycling centres, Councillor Snell, they're capital line items and don't form part of the revenue budget in terms of works. So they have been included in the capital programme. So what was presented to you is still on the books as such. It hasn't disappeared off the table. And Brian might come in on the other matters.

MR GLEESON: Yeah, that's quite correct in relation to the figure. It was just operational costs.

We don't have dedicated litter wardens in the county. So that's why there's no expenditure in relation to that.

Burial grounds. There is an amount of 20,000. Having had discussions with the environmental section we put in 20,000 in relation to historical graveyards and we're looking at maybe developing a grant scheme of some sorts, possibly for local groups to draw down funding to maybe do works there. So that has to be teased out but there is a provision in there in the budget. In relation to I suppose you said about there's a drop of income in relation to burial grounds, if you actually look at, that's

the central management charges again whereby the service support costs have actually dropped but the main direct expenditure has actually increased from 476 to 494. So, as I said, the CMC, the way it is distributed each year it is based on cost drivers, so they can go up or they can go down depending on the number of staff in different areas.

In relation to the climate actions. The breakdown we would have for that figure it's nearly I suppose 2.5. Climate Action Plan of 230,000. Local biodiversity, action plan 100,000. We have the contribution to the energy bureau, 346,000, of which we get funding from the other local authorities who are part of the bureau and the SEAI. We have salaries of approximately 580,000. For energy and climate action we have salaries of 180,000. And then we have 490,000 which was outlined in my presentation, that is being earmarked for actual implementation of energy initiatives next year. That gives a breakdown of that allocation.

Oh, yeah, in relation to fire prevention. Any fire prevention and education that is done we have recorded it under E1101, the operation of the fire service. So that's the way, I suppose. As I said, the format is the format. You're going to have examples whereby we don't charge particular expenditure to a line item in that format, but because it's a template put forward by the Department we have to leave it like that, but any kind of prevention and educational costs are recorded as part of the ongoing operational costs of the fire brigade.

I think that was all the questions, councillor, is it? Yeah.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah. Just, Brian, why was there a reduction in income on environmental climate and communications from the central government?

MR GLEESON: What page are you looking at there?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Page 90. So table F, income.

MR GLEESON: Yeah.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Total government grants and subsidies. Environmental climate and communications down from 440,000 to 350,000. There's 90,000 reduction, which is a large percentage of what they're given. And I just feel that with it being an important item of discussion an action that's needed in the current climate, I just wonder why there's a reduction of income from central government on this.

MR GLEESON: Okay. I will just come back to you on that, councillor, if you don't mind.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: No mind.
MR GLEESON: If there's any other questions?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yes. Are you taking recreation and amenity in this section?
MS O'GORMAN: Yes.
MR GLEESON: Yes.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Can I ask in regard to recreation, no money put aside for that and again maybe on your previous explanations explain, would it be right in saying that's attributed to each municipal district? Like, you're not putting any income for the management of sports halls, the operation of sports halls and stadiums? I accept we don't have stadiums.
MR GLEESON: Yes.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: But we do have sport halls which are in the ownership of the local authority.
MR GLEESON: Yes.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Such as the assembly hall in Wicklow Town of which we were very lucky to get grant funding, but it is micromanaged by the staff of Wicklow County Council. I am sure there's other examples of that throughout the county. I am wondering, are you just -- is it an oversight or is it being -- the funding is being separately attributed to the municipal districts, the cost of managing those facilities.
MR GLEESON: Yes, councillor. That's actually recorded. The assembly hall management costs are recorded in the line below that, community facilities FO403, and there's additional funding for other halls, community halls throughout the county and the other municipal districts.

In relation to, you reference there I suppose the gyms, the sports facilities that we do have, the Coral gyms in Wicklow and Arklow, that's actually up at the top of the page, F0101, leisure facility operations. So the operational costs associated with running those leisure centres are recorded under that particular line item.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: So a lot of what we're doing today obviously is committing to funding for the year ahead in projects and stuff that we have and therefore I welcome what Emer has said in regards to addressing the issue of

development levies, and that's a bigger discussion going forward. Because nowhere in this do I see provision, and there's not one councillor from the back of me to that far side over where Councillor Doyle is, that hasn't been asked about community facilities, parks, pitches, open spaces, and I don't see any funding being set aside. And the Chief Executive might say that they're capital projects that we need to be looking into, but everything that we're putting here, like 1.9 million, parks, pitches and open spaces, my community, they don't see any of that 1.9 million. It's gone up from 1.7 and I welcome that. But to the public representatives that are lucky enough to have parks and pitches that are maintained by the local authority but they're not to the best of my knowledge, I don't know any in my municipal district of East Wicklow, that's parks, pitches and open space, that are maintained or otherwise by the local authority. Most sporting community, voluntary sector groups get a lease off the Council and then they maintain and look after, cut the grass and everything else. And that's why it's no different to local authority houses, where we have resident associations who get small funding. But again, I will pass the budget here today, get up and walk out of here and I won't know where one red cent of that 1.9 million has gone to without having some sort of feedback from the top table. And I understand maybe in the north of the county there is a couple of parks that would fall under that, but definitely not in my municipal district. And I struggle to think in some of the other municipal districts of West Wicklow and South Wicklow, very, very few. And again, it's not to drive a divide between the norm and the Greystones Municipal District, because I'm only surmising that they might have parks that fall under that. But we certainly don't. East, west or south. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I am sure we are all glad you got that hard copy now, John.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Love it. Maybe if everyone had a hard copy they'd be asking questions as well.

MR GLEESON: Yeah, look, parks and open spaces, it's not exclusive to parks. It's open spaces, as in, for example, in Wicklow Town, the cutting of the grass along the Town Relief Road, the Port Relief Road, that covers all the staff costs relating to that is covered. Any grass cutting that takes place down in the Black Castle and so forth, that would come under parks and open spaces. So the bulk of the money in relation to that across the municipal districts is our outdoor workers and the grass cutting that takes place throughout the whole year, you know, verges, everywhere. Councillor, in fairness you see the guys out on the roads cutting the grasses and the verges. So a lot

of that is in relation to that and any open spaces that we have responsible for. Obviously that is going to increase if we are lucky enough to get funding and obviously when we're taking in charge other housing developments that there's parks associated with them. So that's where the additional costs are going to be going forward.

In relation to the question you asked about the funding that had gone down. Basically the funding had gone down to 350,000 from 440 because if you look at the estimated outturn it's only expected to be about 350,000. So we're actually just matching what we're going to get this year. The budget of 440 last year was a budget. We didn't draw down the full amount. There was only 350 we're expecting to draw down. So we have re allocated the money -- sorry, we adjusted that figure to 350. Now usually for grant funding like that, that doesn't restrict any additional funding that comes in. If we get 400,000 we spend 400,000. But we said it is more accurate to bring it back to 350 to match the outturn. Thank you

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks for that, Brian. That clarifies the income on environment. Can I just say in regards to what you've outlined to the members there in regards to parks, pitches and open spaces. I honestly believe that open -- if we're talking about the likes of cutting roadside grass along the port access Town Relief Road it could be misconstrued that it's actually nothing to do with recreation and amenity. It really isn't. And, you know, I certainly couldn't go to members of this town or the surrounding villages and say that we are providing recreation and amenity space which is the grass verges along a very busy road. So really that should be under roads. And that might be extra work for the financial section but genuinely that is sending out the wrong signal to me and to the people who I represent, because I am here talking about 1.9 million that's been spent on parks, pitches and open spaces, and, as you have quite rightly corrected me and said, that it doesn't incorporate all of that, that it's our outdoor staff, it's the men and women out there keeping the road verges and everything pristine the way we want it. But it should not be under table F. It should not be under recreation and amenity. That should come under maybe roads maintenance or if you want to have another title on it. But it is a little bit misleading. Genuinely, you know, it may not have been picked up on to date, but I certainly feel that that certainly shouldn't be in there.

MR GLEESON: Yes, councillor, I understand what you are saying and I agree with the point you're making but this is the format that is put forward by the Department under legislation. We didn't adjust it. We can't decide to move one item in under roads. This is the template that is used with every local authority. So we don't have any option. It has to be recorded under that particular sub-service line unfortunately. At least now, look, you're aware of what that expenditure is going forward but the actual description of the sub-services and the services is locked in and where we can actually record is locked in. We don't have a say in that unfortunately.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, look it, I believe that you should have inserted another column there. So you had your parks and pitches.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think has just been clarified.

MS O'GORMAN: We can't do that.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: But he could put in open spaces.

MS O'GORMAN: No.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: You see that 1.9 million doesn't reflect what I am talking about.

MS O'GORMAN: We accept that, Councillor Snell. But the budget book, the way it is presented it is prescribed by legislation. We have no choice in how it is prescribed. And I understand it's not -- you know, when you see 1.9 million you think public open space, you think a big park. But that is the manner in which we have to report it. We can take the feedback, there's been lots of feedback about the budgetary process here today, back to the Department again and we will certainly do that. But we can't change a line, a column or anything in how it is presented unfortunately.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: So again, Chief Executive, I accept what you're saying, that you can't change it, there's no harm in asking.

MS O'GORMAN: Absolutely.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: But the reality is you can present it better, i.e. that we could have had a separate page given to us on a breakdown of that prior to this meeting to say that actually parks, pitches and open spaces incorporates cutting the grass at the side of the road. If there's one councillor here that knew that before we come in here I'd hazard a guess there isn't, not one councillor was aware of that.

MR GLEESON: With all due respect, councillor, this isn't my first budget, I am sure this issue has come up before, I am sure I have answered it. I would be shocked if this is the first time that people are aware that line item covers grass cutting, you know, or it is the first time it has been raised. That is another frightening thought.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I am conscious that we have other sections to get through.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: No, but just on a point of clarification, I fully accept it is not Brian's first budget, and it is not a personal criticism of Brian, and indeed it is my sixteenth budget and it has never come up in 16 years that falling under pitches, parks and open spaces is actually costed to the cutting of roadside verges, whether it be down in Charlesland, or the Southern Cross in Bray or Port Road Access in town, or Blessington or Arklow or anywhere in between. What I am saying is for budget 2026, and please God all the people that want to be here will be here, that you could break down the costing of the 1.966 million and say actually, you know, to the Elected Members that 1.2 million of that is to parks and pitches. You don't have to have it in this document but can you have a separate sub-note broken-down to explain it to all the Elected Members? I don't think that is an unfair request. And irrespective if I was here for 16 budgets and you were here for five or six or even, whatever, it is irrelevant. It is to the new members that has never come up in my lifetime in this chambers.

MR GLEESON: Councillor, I would refute that. We're not going to be able to break it down by saying this is the amount of outdoor work that was done in relation to parks, this is roadside verges. It is not recorded that way. We don't -- the outdoor workers put in their wages requests every week, and it doesn't break it down, well, I did work on this park or did work on this roadside verge. That's not the way it works. The total amount, I can tell you exactly, this is the amount of wages that is recorded in relation to grass cutting and outdoor space work by the outdoor workers, but I can't break it down by pitch or by the Black Castle or on roads, that's not possible. The financial management system doesn't allow you to break down that level of funding.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Councillor Snell, I am just --

COUNCILLOR SNELL: One final point.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Very quickly.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Is the head of finance saying that that figure is wages? Because if it is I understand what you're saying.

MR GLEESON: The vast majority is wages or if you have to get -- there might be some contractor costs that would supplement it, but the vast majority, probably 80% is wages of the outdoor workers.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: So it comes back to Councillor Fortune's point at the very beginning of the meeting.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. We're going to move on to the next section because I have no other speakers looking to come in. Brian, could you say? The next I have it slightly different.

MR GLEESON: That's all the divisions we have gone through. Now it is on to the decisions the members need to make -- sorry.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Before you move on, Councillor Finn and myself were just chin-wagging there, something we probably forgot and should have mentioned. It'll come up tomorrow night at our district meeting, the situation with the Farrankelly housing estate in Farrankelly. What we are asking is: Is there any provision made to get that problem sorted, if it's not been provided in the budget? I suppose the other question attached to it would be are we going to have to have a funding stream to get the problem sorted? Those houses are in deplorable condition. It will be discussed tomorrow at the meeting. In the context of the budget I am wondering is it in the budget or is there another sub-budget or revenue?

MR NICHOLSON: We have an overall housing maintenance budget, and I fully accept that the housing maintenance budget is not enough to cover all the houses that require to be maintained. We are aware of the problem in Farrankelly. I have had one of my technical staff to look at the estate separately to any other estate, I am aware issues have come in in regard to roofs. We are looking at the disposal of very old, derelict sites, properties. We're hoping to supplement our maintenance budget by income from that. So we are getting it costed up and we intend to give it priority in the current year. So it is being looked at, yeah. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Does anyone else want to come in before I start wrapping up here? Can you make it quick, John?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah. Table F in regards to agriculture, education, health and welfare and then going on to miscellaneous services.

MS O'GORMAN: It is all together.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: You're doing it all together?

MR GLEESON: It is a grouping.
MS O'GORMAN: That's what we said.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Do you have something to ask?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, a hundred percent.
CATHAOIRLEACH: You're on.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I wasn't aware we were taking all four items together. Just in regards to the operation of maintenance, piers and harbours. A number of years ago we were directed by the minister, the relevant minister, that we to take in charge of the harbours along the east coast. At the time I highlighted the fact that, you know, while, yes, the harbour commissioners then become an employee of the local authority, that we would inherit the maintenance and operation of the harbours, and my big fear at the time was that the operation of the harbours is quite simple enough -- it was just replacing like for like so they then become a direct employee of the Council, the same as a tourism officer -- but my concern was the maintenance and what was under the water in regards to pier structures, and would be relevantly funded to sustain what we are taking on board, whether it was in Bray, Greystones, Wicklow or Arklow. Like, 1.8 million for the operation of piers and harbours between the four big piers along the coast. We know there was work to be carried out on the pier walls. Where does that fall in regards to the maintenance of this? Is it a central funding that would be made available on request or are we being left in the lurch here as I feared a number of years ago when it was handed over directly to local authorities?

In regards to the operation of dog warden service, it is quite a small increase but we have horse control and other welfare, animal welfare. Can we have a list of what is entailed in that? Do we only have the one service within the county that services north, east, south and west? How many employees? Again is this solely down to wages or is it maintenance of facilities? And if it is maintenance of facilities could we have a breakdown on it?

Just in regards to the maintenance of the machinery yard. There's been big changes in regards to the machinery yard, for people who wouldn't be familiar, in the last year or so. The machinery yard is out the back of the car park here. And there would have been a number of people employed to look after not just, you know, the yard

itself, the charges, but the vehicles that come, fall within the use of the local authority. I think we were talking about farming out that work. And if we could just have some level of conversation around why it's reduced. There's a reduction of 200,000. Is that staff being moved from the machinery yard? Is that we're no longer putting in the work that's needed to maintain the facilities out there? It's a huge part of the local authority. Apart from the essential work it does, it was a storage depot as well for material from the planning section, older files. Something I brought up here, and I think indeed yourself, Chief Executive, might have said at last year's budget that you would have a look at it but unfortunately it still falls under the remit of Wicklow County Council, and until such time as that changes we're stuck with it. And I would ask those who are running for election should any of yous get in maybe you'd have a chat with the powers that be and say the coroner's fees and expenses should not fall under the remit of Wicklow County Council. It's €220,305. And I just find it baffling that it's there, part and parcel of what this local authority is responsible for and I don't believe it is the responsibility of any local authority.

Weighbridge operations. Can we have some level of feedback in regards to the weighbridge? H0601, weighbridge operations, 35,000. But yet there's no service support costs. So what are we paying for in regards to the weighbridge operations? And where are those weighbridges? Do we have a number of them throughout the county? Are they spread out throughout all five municipal districts? Are we solely dependent on one weighbridge? And again, what is the weighbridge operations?

Can I get a breakdown on the malicious damage, H08? There's funding set aside there for 5 and a half thousand for malicious damage that don't have any other descriptive language here to what would fall under this. So is it municipal district item or is it county council? I just don't know what the malicious damage we're talking about.

Then in regards to operation of markets. No funding set aside for operation of markets at all even though we would have a number of casual trading areas throughout the county.

And you will be glad to hear Cathaoirleach --

CATHAOIRLEACH: Not just me.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: -- one other item. Are you talking the miscellaneous as well?
MR GLEESON: Yes.
MS O'GORMAN: Yes.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: Can I ask under the miscellaneous, we had, and I made a note of it there, and it falls under the other expenses, other expenses. Look it, if you're involved in a small job or an organisation you understand there has to be miscellaneous and small expenses but in this case it falls to 1.331 million with no other level of explanation. And that would fall under the representational payments and that, I assume, of Elected Members and otherwise. Can I have a breakdown on what that 1.3 million? We're talking here in regards to looking for small money to do up footpaths and the like, and yet here we have 1.3 million and nobody here -- certainly I don't know what that money is going forwards. So if we could have a breakdown on that.
CATHAOIRLEACH: There's a fair bit on that. While Brian is preparing that I will invite Councillor Finn in.
COUNCILLOR FINN: I have a nice easy question to ask actually which will be probably much easier to answer than Councillor Snell. A small question, and as it is the first time here I'm not sure if it's -- anyway. Basically I'm wondering, I saw in the budget that the school meals in the county are paid for by Wicklow County Council. And I am wondering why as this is a predominantly Government initiative, why central government are not paying for it and why the Council are. Because while it is not a huge portion of our budget it is certainly a couple hundred thousand.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. Emer, do you want to answer?
MS O'GORMAN: It is fully funded by Government. It is money in, money out. So we pay it and we recoup it back, yeah. And it only relates to the Bray MD area.

Just in relation to Councillor Snell's query on coroner's fees. That's being raised through the CCMA at the moment. We're in discussions with the Department of Justice around that, as a whole sector. Fully to your point, we shouldn't be in the business at all, it's not our function, so there are ongoing discussions at an industrial relations level to transfer the entire service nationwide back to Justice.

Brian might clarify the rest for you hopefully.

MR GLEESON: Okay. Just quickly in relation to the 1.3 million that was referred to under miscellaneous, that's actually the discretionary funding for the municipal districts, the 1.3 million. That would have been clarified at the draft budgetary meetings and the GMA; that line item that would have been in the documentation that issued to all the MDs before approving the GMA. So it is totally the discretionary funding that was generated by the 6% variation on the LPT.

In relation to the harbours, yes, while we can argue about the pluses or minuses of us taking over responsibility for the harbours but the fact of the matter is we do have them. We obviously take the income in for any harbour charges that are made in Arklow and Wicklow, and we do have to find additional money. We put in additional money for dredging in Arklow and Wicklow in the last couple of budgets and as outlined in my presentation we have put in additional funding of our own resources in relation to CCTV security works that need to be installed for both harbours. I would make the point that we do make applications throughout the year for funding for specific capital works throughout the areas. So that wouldn't be recorded under here but I suppose it should be noted that we do get money in, you will be well aware. I think there was a Brexit fund previously that we applied under and we got quite a good amount of funding for capital works. So it's a combination of funding and it's a combination of our resources in relation to the harbours.

The machinery yard. Our stores operation is closed because that was exclusively being done when we had water services and we were in charge of water services, stores was primarily being used for that. As that is no longer the case we have reduced our staffing levels there. Also, I suppose the figure is an estimate on what works we will be doing, as in, as I have said, the way the system works is we purchase vehicles and we charge them out to the municipal districts for their usage. So that is an estimate. It could be more; it could be less. So it is not an actual cut. It is a contra item. So if the expenditure increases the income will increase as well from the district. It is just the best estimate at the moment.

Emer mentioned by the coroner's fees.

The weighbridge. Look, there's a bit of detail in the budget book on page 55 in relation to the way the weighbridge is operated. There are a number of private weighbridges that are appointed under legislation and there's just a nominal amount for any works that need to be done in relation to the existing ones.

I think, dog wardens. That's just a provision, I don't myself have any details. I am not sure whether Teresa has any further details in relation to dog wardens. It is a combination of pay and it is a combination of external costs as well.

MS O'BRIEN: Yeah, that's exactly it. It is a contribution with the ISPCA and providing the service.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Gail Dunne.

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just Wicklow Harbour, and Arklow as well. I welcome the funding for CCTV. This is a step forward. In fairness, I think the security now in harbour is important. The main trade coming through the harbour (inaudible).

Just on the dredging in Wicklow Harbour, in fairness to Brian he provided funding for the dredging. There was 1.2 metres took off the last while and we're still looking at different areas of the harbour, but it has had a huge impact on cargo coming into the harbour and is of benefit to the Council; when more cargo comes in they get paid. So it is positive, the harbour. I welcome the initiative. Thank you

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, councillor. Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: That's perfect timing, Cathaoirleach, because what I actually wanted to do was warmly welcome Councillor Dunne after he done --

CATHAOIRLEACH: I done it.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I missed it at the beginning of the meeting. I wanted to add my good wishes to see him looking fantastic and looking to well. Thanks for giving me that chance.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We did do it earlier.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: I missed it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, just an explanation in regards to malicious damage, the funding for malicious damage. I did ask for clarification on that.

MR GLEESON: Yeah, that's a small apportionment of legal salaries. There's -- we make claims every year. There's a scheme where we can refund any -- there is a malicious damages scheme that the Department have, and I think we avail of it maybe three years ago. We haven't the last couple of years. So it is just the time of the legal department in putting forward the documentation to make a claim in that regard. That's all that is.

Just in relation to the weighbridges, I got a bit more information in relation to that. The last couple of years, that 35,000 has been capitalised to build up a fund to renovate the weighbridge that is at Newtown. So there's discussions ongoing with an adjoining landowner. So when they conclude the idea or the plan would be to undertake works to upgrade that facility. Okay.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Can I just thank the top table for their openness and transparency in regards to the answering of the questions here today, and I would like to propose this budget if you're ready to take proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, no, not yet.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: You's not?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I have different aspects to get through. I do appreciate your assistance, but I have a procedure I have to follow too as well. Thank you, Councillor Snell.

So, Helen, I am going to pass over -- Brian.

MR GLEESON: Just to summarise the next steps before over to Helen. Obviously the first stage is to agree the ARV rate for the commercial rates for next year. What we are proposing is to keep it at 0.217. So it will mean there's no change to any commercial rates, bills, next year. The next stage will be to agree the rates abatement rate on vacant premises. We have proposed 20% to be brought in for next year. And then, assuming the two of those are passed we move onto the last stage which is the adoption of the full budget. So I will hand over to Helen now. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And then we go to a vote.

MS PURCELL: So we have three different motions to pass. I will read the first one out to you first and the Cathaoirleach will then seek a proposer and seconder for it.

"Subject to section 6 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended, and in accordance with the proposed budget, Wicklow County Council has determined the annual rate on valuation applicable in the calculation of the amount of the rate under section 4 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019, as amended, to be 0.217 for 2025."

CATHAOIRLEACH: We have a proposer. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin, you're proposing this are you? Perfect. And a seconder? Councillor Caroline Winstanley. Thank you.

MS PURCELL: Okay. So that is proposed by Councillor Fenelon Gaskin, seconded by Councillor Winstanley. And we will now have a vote on that.

Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Yes.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Mark Barry? Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy. Not present. Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: For.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Orla Finn?

COUNCILLOR FINN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy?

COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Tom Fortune?
COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peir Leonard? Not present. Councillor Jason Mulhall? Not present. Councillor Miriam Murphy? Sorry, is that Councillor Mulhall? Councillor Mulhall, just confirming for?
CATHAOIRLEACH: He did say for.
MS PURCELL: He did say for. I'll come back to you. Councillor Miriam Murphy is not present. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill is not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole? Not present. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.
MS PURCELL: Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.
MS PURCELL: Councillor Edward Timmins? Not present. And Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. That is 24 in favour and 8 not present.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. We will move onto the second vote. Thank you, Helen.

MS PURCELL: So the second vote is that: "Wicklow County Council makes a scheme for the abatement of rates due to it by liable persons or classes of liable persons in respect of vacant properties in accordance with the provisions of section 9 of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019. Such a scheme would provide for 20% abatement of rates on vacant premises as provided for in section 9(1) of the Local Government Rates and Other Matters Act 2019 for the financial year ending 31st December 2025."

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Councillor Erika Doyle.
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: I would like to propose that, thank you, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. A seconder? Councillor Danny Alvey. Thank you.
MS PURCELL: Okay. So that is proposed by Councillor Doyle and seconded by Councillor Alvey. And again, we will have a vote. This is in relation to the abatement rate.

Councillor Danny Alvey?
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Mark Barry is not present. Councillor Joe Behan?
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For. Councillor Malachaí Duddy is not present.
Councillor Gail Dunne?
COUNCILLOR DUNNE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?
COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Tom Fortune?
COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peir Leonard? Not present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Miriam Murphy is not present. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill? Not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole? Not present. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS PURCELL: For.
Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor John Snell? Councillor Scott?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For. Sorry, I couldn't hear you, Helen.
MS PURCELL: No problem. For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.
MS PURCELL: For Councillor Stephen Stokes is not present. Councillor Edward Timmins is not present. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Again, it is 24 in favour and 8 not present.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Thank you. We will now go to our final vote and the vote on the budget. Councillor Gail Dunne indicated before, Councillor Snell, he would like to propose it. So can I have a seconder? Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: How? Sorry.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Because I was looking at the screen.
COUNCILLOR SNELL: But you had a proposal there.
COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: I am happy for Councillor Snell to second it.
COUNCILLOR DUNNE: I would propose the budget. I would just like to thank Brian and the staff, and all the other directors. I have no hesitation in proposing the budget.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell seconded it, sorry.
MS PURCELL: So it is: "To consider the Chief Executive Draft Budget of Wicklow Council County for the year ending 31st December 2025 and subject to the provisions of section 103 of the Local Government Act 2001, as amended, to the resolution adopting the draft budget for 2025 without amendment."

It is proposed by Councillor Dunne and seconded by Councillor Snell.
Councillor Danny Alvey?
COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Mark Barry is not present. Councillor Joe Behan?
COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?
COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?
COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?
COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?
COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.
MS PURCELL: Councillor Malachaí Duddy is not present. Councillor Gail Dunne?
COUNCILLOR DUNNE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Orla Finn?
COUNCILLOR FINN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?
COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR FLYNN KENNEDY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Tom Fortune?
COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Patsy Glennon?
COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?
COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.
MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Shane Langrell?
COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.
MS PURCELL: For Councillor Peir Leonard is not present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?
COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.
MS PURCELL: Thank you. Councillor Miriam Murphy is not present. Councillor Ian Neary?
COUNCILLOR NEARY: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?
COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?
CATHAOIRLEACH: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill is not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole is not present. Councillor Graham Richmond?
COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Lourda Scott?
COUNCILLOR SCOTT: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor John Snell?
COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.
MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?
COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Stephen Stokes is not present. Councillor Edward Timmins is not present. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?
COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: For.
MS PURCELL: Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Just while you are adding them I am going to let Brian come in, or the Chief Executive.
MS O'GORMAN: Members, thank you very much. I know it has been a difficult process to get through. It has not been an easy couple of weeks for anybody. But I do thank you for your time and consideration here today. I want to pay a particular thank you I suppose to the full management team but in particular to Brian, the Director of Finance, and to Denise and Breda on his team. They make it a lot less complicated for everybody. I know it is an extremely complicated programme, but I mean to be fair to Brian's team they do an incredible piece of work on putting together a balanced budget. It is never easy so I just want to extend my thanks to them. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Helen, do you want to declare the result?
MS PURCELL: So just the result of that: We are 24 in favour and 8 not present. Thanks.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Just on behalf of myself and the members I want to thank you -- Brian, do you want to go ahead?
MR GLEESON: Yeah. Just very quickly, I won't keep you. Just obviously to thank the members here today and thank you for a worthwhile discussion. I feel there was a lot of good points made and that makes for a better budget I think. And also just, as Emer said, to thank my own members of staff, in particular Denise Kinsella and Breda McCarthy who are over in the wings there, and Yvonne Kelly as well who did a huge amount of work. I suppose, look, this might be three hours today but there's about five months' work that goes into it. We started the process back in July, so I just want to put on record my huge appreciation to those people and the rest of the finance section for the huge amount of work that has taken place in relation to this. Thank you.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I know everyone is eager to get out but I just want to thank everyone again for their patience here today. It was a worthwhile discussion. I just want to welcome Councillor Dunne back again. I look forward to

having you back in the chamber as well, Councillor Dunne. Just Helen has a couple of reminders and I will see yous all here next Monday, or most of you.

MS PURCELL: Just to say there is soup and sandwiches up in the canteen now if the members would like, and the management team and staff would like to go up and join in. And next Monday, just to remind everybody, we are having a presentation at 11 o'clock for those retired members and nonelected members, and it would be great if everybody could be present. That will be followed by Christmas lunch and then you will have your December meeting at 2 o'clock. Thank you.

(Meeting concluded at 1:24pm)

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