



Michael McCarthy: So we'd like to start from my extreme right, and we'll go right around to my extreme left.

Patrick Greene: Patrick Greene, Director of Services for Operations.

Patricia Philbin: Patricia Philbin, Director of Services for Urban Development.

Leonard Cleary: Leonard Cleary, Chief Executive.

Helen Kilroy: Helen Kilroy, Director of Finance and Corporate Development.

Elizabeth Fanning: Elizabeth Fanning, Acting Director of Services for Social Development.

Derek Pender: Derek Pender, Director of Services for Project Development.

Alan McDermott: Alan McDermott, NOAC Secretariat.

Michael McCarthy: Michael McCarthy, Chair of NOAC.

Declan Breathnach: Declan Breathnach, Member of NOAC.

Brian Cawley: Brian Cawley, Member of NOAC.

John Byrne: John Byrne, Board Member.

Margaret Lane: Margaret Lane, Member of NOAC.

Noel Harrington: Noel Harrington, Board Member.

Miriam McDonald: Miriam McDonald, Board Member.

John Goldrick: Good morning. John Goldrick, member of the NOAC Secretariat.

Leonard Cleary: Dia dhaoibh ar maidin, agus go raibh maith agaibh ar son cuireadh teacht anseo inniu. Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to discuss Galway City Council, its growth and development, and our own performance that underpins it. As the most accessible form of government to the people of Galway, the staff and elected members have a singular mandate to serve, to represent and to support the people of Galway City through effective and progressive management of our local authority.

Galway City is a young, and a vibrant, multicultural and a creative city with a resident population of over 84,000. The city is home to over 30,000 third - level students, world leaders in the arts, including the Galway International Arts Festival, Macnas, Druid and an internationally renowned MedTech cluster and a strong emerging ICT cluster also.

We welcome over 2.7 million visitors each year to the city who come to experience our culture, our heritage and the Wild Atlantic Way. Our unique location on Galway Bay, as a special area of conservation, the city benefits from a wealth of natural resources, and these are aligned, of course, with some of the challenges, being built as a city on water, in an environmentally sensitive location.

Is cathaireach dhátheangach i cathair na Gaillimhe, the only bilingual city in Ireland, and a Gaeltacht service town, with two large areas of Gaeltacht within the city boundary. Freisin, tá dhá Uachtarán na hÉireann a bhí mar comhairleoirí i cathaireach na Gaillimhe.

As a regional city tasked with addressing imbalances in the country, Galway City has a population target of 120,000 by 2040 in the National Planning Framework, and nearly 30% of all workers in the Western Region live in the Galway City catchment, up 3% since the last census.

Our relationship with our closest neighbour, Galway County Council, it's collaborative and it's collegiate, with both local authorities focused on cooperation and regional development in the West. I joined Galway City Council myself in May 2024 as Chief Executive, and following the local elections in 2024, the start of the new five-year term for the elected members, it brought an opportunity for us to re-examine strategic priorities for Galway for the council term and beyond.

We set about immediately setting up a workshop with elected members to identify those priorities and to see how best we could deliver on transformational change, the ambitions outlined for Galway City in the National Development Plan, the local area priorities and area-based priorities of the elected members in our three wards.

This led then to the identification of 12 strategic priorities for Galway, and these include economic, social and cultural drivers in the North-West region, as the city driving the West of Ireland. Our priorities include, of the 12; the N6 Galway City Ring Road, the Bus Connects model, the Galway City Flood Defence Scheme – Coirib go Cósta – the funding model for local government needs to be looked at, a pilot tourist bed night tax, wastewater infrastructure to grow all development, and the regeneration of two strategic sites at the Dyke Road and Sandy Road.

The enablement of growth in the east of the city in the area of Ardaun, which is close to the Galway Clinic, and then two capital projects related to the Clifden Railway Bridge. We're also proposing the growth and development of Galway Port and the whole development of an infrastructure fund for cultural projects. We submitted these projects to the National Programme for Government to ensure that they align with the government plans in the years ahead.

Engagement overall with our 18 elected members has resulted in approving some difficult, but significant decisions in terms of the working capital of the local authority. The local property tax was increased by 15% in October 2024 for a fixed term of five years, making it the first change in the local property tax, in fact, since the introduction of the tax in 2013. Members also agreed to

adjust the ARV in November 2024 and again in 2025, and this was very much a welcome uplift, while still lagging behind some of the country averages, such as the substantially-- our rate, the rates of other cities such as Limerick, Cork and Waterford.

However, over the two years, we achieved a 6% increase and a 3% increase, resulting in a 9% ARV increase in two years. There hadn't been an ARV increase in 10 years. Parking charges have also had a marginal increase in 2026, and this brings our budget now for Galway City Council close to €160 million.

The areas that our budget is trying to address in terms of priorities, starting with housing delivery, government priority, our first priority-- just getting towards the few final points--

Michael McCarthy: Yes, thank you.

Leonard Cleary: -- focusing on community facilities, maintenance of homeless services, grant schemes, planting and maintenance crews, a Disability Access Officer, among other target areas.

We also looked at potential income generators and also looking from the rates at potential to generate income from derelict sites, a dividend from Galway Port and other growth in commercial services. The structure of Galway City Council has changed, and as the directors have introduced themselves, we now have a structure focusing on Social, Operational, Urban, Project Development and lastly, Corporate Development and this structure supports our 12 key priorities as well as our corporate plan.

We've also introduced a number of new roles, and just maybe to give an example, we've introduced new Urban and Community Development Officers, a Head of Tourism, a Head of Communications. We've established a European Projects Unit and also a Head of Real Estate, focusing on our property.

So just to conclude, in the coming months, staff will begin the process of moving to our new headquarters at Crown Square in Mervue, and that's a significant saving in terms of the capital investment and the options available to us. It'll bring staff together in one single location, having been in four

different sites. It's a significant development for staff and for the public, and we look forward to welcoming all to the new building as our civic centre.

Go raibh mile maith agat, a chathaoirligh.

Michael McCarthy: Thank you. A nice reference to the fact we have board members occupying the highest office of the land in quick succession, really important.

Now, I'm going to begin with a standard question, and it's a question we ask all of the visitors, in terms of risks. I suppose to begin with, what risks are currently ranked highest from the Galway perspective, in terms of impact or the likelihood of an impact on the corporate risk register? Is there something that stands out?

Helen Kilroy: Yeah, so I can take that one. So in terms of our top five risks, the top two in terms of impact or level are cybersecurity and health and safety. Two areas that we have very low risk appetite on. Following on from that, we have business continuity, child safeguarding and financial control.

Michael McCarthy: That's really interesting. Any kind of, particularly as you say, from a cyber aspect, any kind of mitigating measures that you're taking now, in anticipation of that risk?

Helen Kilroy: So, actually, we have taken on board two new staff in terms of cybersecurity, dedicated to monitoring the cyber network in our organisation, and when they joined, we had an internal audit done on the cybersecurity measures we have in place, with a view to that informing the new team as to their areas of focus. But getting that done was actually very worthwhile because, first of all, it was reassuring to see that we did have good controls in place.

But look, cyber, it's an ever-evolving world, you have to, you know, you're only ever trying to stay on top of it. Unfortunately, the scammers and hackers out there are always one step ahead, so, you know, we have a roadmap there now in terms of bringing it forward, and we've set up a committee across all departments. We've a real focus on making sure that all

areas understand that they own the cybersecurity risk as much as the IT department do.

Michael McCarthy: And is there continual training provided to staff, particularly, say in areas like finance, being obvious focal targets or focal points and targets for scammers?

Helen Kilroy: Yes, yes. Yes, we had a system in place, we're just going out to bring in a new system, actually, but we had a system in place that delivered regular training, and we could monitor as well ourselves then who had completed the training and who hadn't, so we could follow up and make sure that was getting done.

Michael McCarthy: And the people who do these trainings, was it external or was it in house? Or a combination?

Helen Kilroy: This was an external system, that, I suppose, there was regular updates on the training, every few months, really, there was something new. We also perform phishing tests in-house, and anyone who fails—

Michael McCarthy: Sorry, now, is that we'll say, testing staff? We can all be relaxed when opening emails, and there's always something for free and that, so that kind of testing?

Helen Kilroy: Yes, so that's what I was coming onto there, we do a phishing test once a year, as well, and any staff who fail that phishing test are subject to additional training.

Michael McCarthy: Okay, perfect. And just one more question before I go to Working Group Two. There was a controversy recently in relation to the use of a chauffeur service for the mayor, and the local authority committed to reviewing that. You might just explain briefly how it came about, what the review was kind of dealing with, or is there a timeline around the review of that?

Leonard Cleary: So, maybe just to give the context first, we're twinned with 10 different cities across the world, the US and Europe, and very strong relationships with a number of those cities. There was an invitation to the Mayor of Galway City to travel to Morocco, to Agadir, to begin a process of engagement with a view to twinning into the future. The Moroccan authorities, in fact, sponsored the majority of the cost, including accommodation, etc., for the mayor.

In Galway City, for health and safety reasons, the mayor has a car, and it's just practically impossible to have parking and the mayor moving between six and seven different events during the course of the day. The mayor was dropped to the airport, which is a two-hour drive from Galway City. There was an error in the invoicing. That was corrected. It was an opportunity also to review that we would try and confine the use of the car primarily to the city, which is only on a call-out basis. On this particular occasion, there was a Freedom of Information Act exercised by a journalist, who published the amount of the invoice, which was corrected, and it was recorded in the article.

I suppose going forward, the Corporate Services Team reviewed it with the mayor, and both agreed that it would be more practical just to use the bus from Citylink or whatever appropriate service from Galway City direct to Dublin Airport, which has a good service. The mayor was quite happy to do that, so that's where it's at. There was also, in that particular media article, a recording of the gift that was given, so the gift that was given to the locals in Agadir was some locally handcrafted socks, which were supported by the local enterprise office, and given as gifts to the dignitaries there, at a very nominal, €30 per gift, supporting local enterprise in Galway. The article read slightly different, that you'd think maybe the mayor was wearing a number of pairs himself.

On the grand scheme of things, the twinning relationship is quite strong. We have appointed an International Relations Officer at Senior Staff Officer level, who is focusing on growing the ties with the various twinning cities, and for St. Patrick's

Day, we had visits to Seattle and to Boston, and the Seattle twinning relationship is 40 years in existence this year and very, very strong ties, in fact, with some of the council coming from the state this very week for Easter to Galway City. And it's very important that we develop and grow those relationships in the United States and in Europe at all times. And particularly strong in supporting our MedTech cluster in Galway.

Michael McCarthy: I think that's an important point, so the Moroccan authorities covered, kind of, you know—

Leonard Cleary: They covered the mayor's accommodation, yes. So the cost incurred was a review of the particular service, so we'll focus the service anymore, just for his health and safety, in parking and being driven around the city for a number of appointments. A mayor in a city, as distinct from a Cathaoirleach in a rural county, would have a lot more appointments; it's almost a full-time job in a city.

Michael McCarthy: Thank you. Okay, I'm going to open the questioning to the colleagues, beginning with Working Group Two.

Noel Harrington: Thanks a million, Chair. And first of all, just to say that Working Group Two is myself, Noel Harrington and also the Chairman of the Group, Ciarán Hayes, unfortunately, can't be here, and Anne Haugh is also a member of the Working Group, unfortunately, not here at the moment.

Working Group Two is the group that is involved in the compilation, the validation and the publication of the performance indicators for NOAC. So in that context, then I have two questions, and they're both related to housing as they would appear in the performance indicators report.

The first one relates-it's performance indicator page 3b, it's the average cost expended on getting the re-tenanted units ready for reletting. And I'd note over the period of time, there's been a kind of a variable performance on the cost, but in 2024, unfortunately, we have to tell you, on our information, it's the highest cost expended on reletting. And in saying that, I can say, you know, 2024/2023 were not great, but it's six or seven years before that was excellent, in terms of achieving a national average, and before that, for a couple of years again it was a

bit iffy. Maybe you could give an explanation as to why in the last two years it became more expensive?

Elizabeth Fanning: Yeah, I suppose, the reason is, I suppose, because we have like, instead of just a maintenance window, we're taking a strategic opportunity to do a deep retrofit on a lot of our houses. A lot of the houses in Galway are very old; the average age is about 40 years. They come back in very bad condition, a lot of them, and also, I suppose, the reason why it can take so long for the change of tenancy is because of refusals and that whole allocations piece.

So I suppose we have a lot of older houses. Just for an example, I suppose, a deep retrofit of a very old house that had to come back to a tenancy would have cost 185, but that's only about 2% of all of our houses; that was a particularly unusual one. We have about 33% of our houses that come in at about 12 grand and then the kind of standard performance would be 31 grand at 33 weeks. So I suppose you can see, there's a big variation there between a light touch, a standard and a deep retrofit.

But we have been very successful in retrofitting all of our properties. We spend all of our budget every year, and we actually would spend more if we get more budget, and we did; they doubled our budget this year, so we've got 90 units to do this year.

But we're still going to find that difficult to meet our climate action target, which I suppose is something we all have to strive to do, and that's why we've been concentrating on the energy retrofitting. And I suppose there's also that protecting vulnerable households from energy poverty. So we see this as, we're taking a strategic direction to do these deep retrofits at this time.

Noel Harrington: So, can I just ask, based on that, because, we'll say, from '22, '21, '20, '19, '18, those years, you were kind of more or less matching or meeting the national average in terms of the cost expended. Was there a decision then taken to grasp the nettle on these deep retrofit projects?

Elizabeth Fanning: I suppose it's in line with our Climate Action Plan. It's to retrofit; in order to meet our targets there, we focused on energy retrofitting. It's also the time, it's the right time to do it like. We're not doing it because we have

to; we're striving to meet our targets. And I suppose we also have a decarbonisation zone, so any houses that come up in a decarbonisation zone, we'll always do a deep energy retrofit. Other local authorities haven't done as much ERP as we would have, which has driven the costs up.

Noel Harrington: So--, there's an element of kind of front-loading this in the last two years, hopefully it then will be paying off over the next couple of years, and will we see, we'll, we expect to see, a levelling off of those fees or that expenditure being brought to the national average again.

Elizabeth Fanning: Absolutely. This is front-loading, and also with the introduction of our planned maintenance, I suppose if we maintain our properties better, you know, it should reduce the costs, you know, going forward as well. So like, an intervention on a deep retrofitted home mightn't be for another ten or fifteen, twenty years, so it is just, you know, fronting the costs at the moment, but it should taper off, yeah.

Noel Harrington: Well, I note the-- on your maintenance, on it is quite good. It matches the national average quite well and exceeds it so-

Elizabeth Fanning: Yes, the 1.8 million, yes.

Michael McCarthy: Sorry, I'll just let him speak on this subject a bit now, so-

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, just on that very point, I suppose just to acknowledge that in very recent times, this month, a new circular has issued from the department giving a very, very clear direction, so we will obviously have to adjust our policy. The direction is now that the tenancy must be just turned around, the retrofit will just have to, the direction from the department is to pause the retrofit, which is different from the policy we have been following from the other unit within the department, which was asking for the retrofit to happen. But we must follow the direction now, which is the retrofit cannot happen now, when the property is vacant.

It will, of course, achieve a better number in terms of turnaround time, but the retrofit has to be paused; the circular is very clear in that direction. So we'll have to implement that with immediate effect.

Noel Harrington: Okay—

John Byrne: Sorry – is that regardless of the condition of the house?

Leonard Cleary: My understanding is the retrofit must wait now. We must make sure that the house is safe, fit for purpose, for tenancy. But in terms of retrofit upgrade, that's not considered essential.

Elizabeth Fanning: You can't do an energy retrofit on a vacant property, so, which is- there the ones we have been doing it on. Now, a lot of local authorities finding that very unusual, so we have put a submission in through the HSACO, to say that that isn't really a good idea, but at the moment, that's the direction, but we're awaiting on maybe further details on it.

Leonard Cleary: So, of course, we will engage through the sector with the department to see what practical way they would like to approach it. But it's very, very clear, so we'll implement it. Yep.

Noel Harrington: And my second question then is related, and it's the average time from vacation date to reletting date, in terms of weeks. It's performance indicator page 3a. Again, the news isn't great, the PI shows a weak performance, and a weaker performance consistently over a period of eight, nine or 10 years, where the reletting time is on or below, maybe just look at the figures, give or take between 40% and 60% greater than the national, the average. Is that a structural issue? Or is there a reason why over, like in a given year, you might, you could say something, but over a period of nine or 10 years, you might—

Elizabeth Fanning: Yeah, it isn't a great figure. Just to let you know, the 2025 figure will be a lot less; it's 43.5, so we're going in the right direction – you don't have that figure yet. But it was 48 was 2024, and it's gone down to 43.5

in 2025, so we are moving in the right direction. And I suppose the reason why it was taking longer because we were doing a higher spec and a deep retrofit is going to take a lot more time than a paint – a light-touch paint and clean-up job. So, naturally, it's going to take longer.

It also was a resource issue as well, so we have allowed for a dedicated change of tenancy team in our workforce plan, so we will be recruiting a whole separate direct labour team, just to concentrate on change of tenancies and to bring that number way down, so. And like, it is going in the right direction and with more resources, we will be able to bring it down further.

We've also introduced frameworks now as well, where we have contract frameworks as well. We use our own direct labour crew, plus we also, in consultation with the unions, we contract out to a contractor to do a change of tenancies as well, so that's why the figures are starting to move in the right direction now.

Noel Harrington: May I ask, when you say that they are in place now, have they, in recent times, just been put in place, we'll say maybe 2025/2026—

Elizabeth Fanning: The contractors are in place for the last two years, but the dedicated team won't be in place until another few years. It has to do with our strategic workforce plan, but we have allowed for it in the plan. But we are doing a lot more with our own resources and with contractors, and that's why the timing is coming down as well.

Michael McCarthy: Thank you, Noel. Working Group Three.

Miriam McDonald: Okay. Thank you all very much so far. Just coming back, can I just ask one question, Helen – am I right in that you said the phishing test is carried out once a year?

Helen Kilroy: Yes.

Miriam McDonald: And do you think- are you happy with that?

Helen Kilroy: Look, we could always carry these things out more frequently, you know, time and resources is obviously a challenge in that respect with the IT team. We've a very small team trying to cover a lot of projects, as well as maintain the operations, but yeah, it would be great to do it more frequently, because as I was saying earlier, you know, with cyber now, you know, it just gets smarter and smarter every day, and you're always just trying to stay one step ahead, but I think the mix of the two, the phishing test and the regular training, we hope are well covered.

Miriam McDonald: Just, it just seems as you say, things are changing so often, and the phishing attempts are changing in their nature so often, that once a year—you know, we were with a different part of the local government sector last week and they're doing phishing tests every day.

Helen Kilroy: Every day?

Elizabeth Fanning: Wow.

Leonard Cleary: God – they must have great staff.

Elizabeth Fanning: Yeah, yeah. I think we'd have to up our staffing significantly to achieve that, but look, as I've said, we've just brought in a new training software, it's called KnowB4, you know, and really we hope with more regular training and updates, and as I said, we've initiated a cross-sectoral cyber committee. What we're really trying to drive is that ownership of the cyber risk within each department, that it's not just owned by the IT team. So, it's a mixture of measures really, and as I always say, it's IT – managing IT risk is about layers, there's no one definitive answerable cover of the risk.

Miriam McDonald: Yeah, okay. Okay, so I'm the Chair of WG Three, which is the group that looks after communications and customer service, so I actually understand what you're saying in terms of the ownership of IT being across the organisation, I mean, it's the same with communications – it should be

across. And we just have some standard questions, as well as more detailed questions. So, just on the standard questions – do you conduct your own customer service survey? Sorry, I don't know who I'm directing this to—

Helen Kilroy: That's me again, yeah.

Miriam McDonald: Is it you again? Do you conduct your own customer surveys in-house?

Helen Kilroy: Well, we recently implemented a new customer service action plan, and as part of that, we did a public consultation process and on top of that, we have, with this new term of the council, introduced a corporate development SPC in which communications is one of the areas of focus. So, we've been getting feedback and working with the SPC members as well, in terms of driving the customer service/communications piece forward.

Miriam McDonald: Okay. So, in terms of the public consultation, what was the outcome of that? Or were there any particular findings?

Helen Kilroy: To be honest, it was quite limited, the feedback. We advertised it across a number of channels, but we didn't get any significant feedback on it. The most relevant feedback kind of came from members, and as I said, the SPC. Look, really, in terms of customer service, it comes down to kind of response times, getting information out into the public domain, as well as the other key area of focus. And we're hoping now, we are introducing a CRM system that's due to go live next month, so we're hoping all that will help drive the customer service piece forward.

Miriam McDonald: And why did you initiate the public consultation? Was there something that drove it?

Helen Kilroy: I suppose there was no point in delivering an action plan without consulting the customers, so it was that.

Miriam McDonald: Okay. So other than that, you don't have a customer survey?

Helen Kilroy: I don't think we've done one in recent years; it's probably a few years ago since we've done a customer service survey.

Miriam McDonald: Okay. And do you have a complaint tracking system?

Helen Kilroy: That will come in with the CRM system.

Miriam McDonald: Okay. Okay, so at the moment you don't. And I know you mentioned you've just appointed a Communications Director, is it?

Leonard Cleary: A Head of Communications, yes.

Miriam McDonald: Yeah. So, are you setting up a communications team, or what do you hope for that person to achieve?

Helen Kilroy: So we have had a Communications Officer for the last number of years, we've now, I suppose, decided as an area of focus, to grow the team a bit further. And we've a number of new appointments – the Head of Communications will therefore be, you know, in terms of Head of the department and driving the department strategically forward. And then there's a number of appointments underneath that in terms of, it'll be, I suppose, driving of digital content across our website and social media platforms. So yes, we hope that the Head of Communications they've been appointed, but they just haven't started yet, so we're hoping they're imminent in the next few weeks. So the plan there is that that person will drive the communications strategy forward, linking in with all different types of stakeholders.

Miriam McDonald: And how many staff will they have?

Helen Kilroy: Four – five, sorry. Five.

Miriam McDonald: And just on the, so is there a communications strategy developed? Or does that person have to develop it?

Helen Kilroy: There is one developed, but the new person will be tasked with, you know, reviewing and improving the strategy in place.

Miriam McDonald: And that kind of leads me onto my next question, which is around the LGMA survey that's carried out annually. And you did perform very well in people knowing the work of the local authority, but one area - I suppose we maybe highlight on the negative, sorry - was that you were below the national average in simple and easy to engage with, at 36% compared with 44%. So, I suppose, what-- are you aware of that? And what actions might you take?

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, very much aware of it and I think partly related to the fact that we're across four sites as well, so for the customer dealing with different departments we have had to rent over the past decade a number of properties around the city, so I think we'll address that with the new single point of contact in the new HQ in Crown Square. We're moving in there at the end of the year, and we have a whole streamlined process for customer service interaction from the moment that they enter the building, then they'll be streamed into the various areas.

So we'll be hopeful that that would be much more accessible for the customer going forward, and one single point of contact as well, rather than moving between different buildings, which is unsatisfactory for the customer, and it's also unsatisfactory for the different teams who are trying to collaborate together across different buildings.

Miriam McDonald: And that streamlined process, has that been developed or has it still to be developed?

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, so the Corporate Services team are currently working on it. In fact, they've had a number of study visits to various local authorities, mainly in the region, just to examine their processes for streamlining. So we

have, we're confident we will have an effective model going forward and a different type of modern building for the customer to have more privacy, particularly in the area of housing.

Miriam McDonald: Okay, thank you. Okay, I'll hand over to Declan now.

Declan Breathnach: Thanks, Miriam. And thank you for your introduction. I'm on the same committee as Miriam, dealing with the whole issue of Access and Equality. And in your opening statement, you mentioned of getting back to bases, with the buildings. I'll start with Equality and Access and ask again the LGMA survey, it speaks about being fair and equal, but Galway City achieved 31%, significantly lower than the national average of 38 in terms of Equality and Access. And Point B in relation to Equality and Access would be under the same Age-Friendly category; you scored 22%, below the 27% national average. Could you tell us what measures you have underway in this regard, in addition to obviously bringing the council offices together? I don't think it will resolve those two significantly lower-than-average issues. So would you respond to that piece?

Helen Kilroy: Thanks. Look, I'll suppose begin with that in terms of we have in recent times completed an assessment of our public sector duty, and we have an implementation plan now finalised, and we've put together a cross-sectoral committee to look after the implementation plan and deliver on that. That committee, the inaugural meeting will be in April. So that implementation plan spans all directorates and all areas of services. We do have some new recruitment, maybe Patricia could update on?

Patricia Philbin: Yeah. We do intend to recruit a full-time Access Officer. I know in other local authorities it's kind of part of a job, but this would be a full-time Access Officer, so we're just finalising the information booklet on that, and it'll be advertised in the next couple of weeks. We also have a contact point within our Architectural Services Department to review designs to ensure that they're age-friendly and disability-friendly as well, so we'll continue that work with the Access Officer across all departments.

Leonard Cleary: I might just ask Derek to comment on age-friendly and our appointments there and our staff.

Derek Pender: Yeah, so we have developed, in collaboration with our partners in Galway County Council, last year, the Galway Age Friendly Strategy. So some of the initiatives, just two or three of the initiatives off that was we held a Positive Ageing week last week-- last October/November. We had a Local Heroes Exhibition, which was actually nominated for a national award – we weren't successful, but we were nominated for a national award, and Galway County and City jointly hosted the National Age-Friendly Recognition Awards in Galway City in November of last year. So, we acknowledge the percentages that you're referring to, but we have definitely taken some strides forward in addressing that.

Declan Breathnach: Thank you. My second question relates to improvement of Customer Services, and again, looking at the various averages, under all sub-categories in this theme. For example, Galway City scored 35% under on most customer-focused, in comparison to the national average of 43%. Can you explain, again, under the customer services, why those figures are clearly under the national averages?

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, I suppose it's very hard to definitively answer the question, apart from to say that we're, I suppose, customer-oriented in our focus going forward with the establishment of the new committee, and very conscious that we do need, I've outlined the streamlining of processes, and we do need to make sure that the customer experience is improved.

I think one of the areas that we had a challenge, on a deficit, really, is the communications piece. Just the dynamic within a city council, as distinct maybe from a rural county council, there's quite an airing of all minor minute details or issues in the media, that's very, very important that we have a very strong communications and management of the narrative around the positive delivery of services. So we're conscious of that going forward. Helen has outlined the strengthening of the team. So I think maybe the survey picked up

very much on perception, and perception can be very much influenced by the media, so I think we have a piece of work to do in that area, to be more proactive, and I think you'll find that the figures will turn around very quickly going forward, combined with our new civic centre.

Elizabeth Fanning: Just to add to that as well, from the housing perspective as well. We've actually, we asked our staff would they like to be a part of a communications team. We got a huge-, a lot of them volunteered, so we're setting up our own housing communications and customer service group that will interact with the new team. And I think just with the new CRM system coming in and the move to Crown, there's a huge opportunity to really drive, because I think in housing, it's probably what people might complain a little bit about, so we do want to absolutely 100% focus on that going forward with the new communication team and the move to Crown.

Helen Kilroy: Yeah, I was going to add as well, in terms of the CRM system, you know, obviously, traditionally, you know, the customers will come into the building, and as Leonard outlined, we are, we're looking at that piece. But on top of that, we'll be going live with our CRM system, which will provide a full end-to-end view for any customer that does put a query or complaint through that portal.

Declan Breathnach: Thank you to all of you. Can I just say, I look forward to the next survey, to see will those figures hopefully have improved. I'm going to hand over to John—

Michael McCarthy: Sorry, before you go any further—

Patrick Greene: Yeah, just, Declan, I'll just give you an example of, I suppose, physically how challenging it is in Galway to manage accessibility. So I've been in Operations, where we manage all of the parks, beaches and so on. We have a great example at the minute from a wheelchair access point of view in Salthill. So we have a ramp down to the beach to let wheelchair users down to the water – it's been corroded and washed out of it with storms and so on. We can't just go in

there and repair that. We now have to go and do a full-blown EIAR, do a full planning assessment, go to Part 10, and we're at €50/60 grand before we ever get near the ramp. So it's that kind of complexity that's really, really challenging for us as the team, and the amount of resources that takes, both physically and cost-wise, is abnormal comparing to what it should be, really in my head. Just an example of how difficult it is.

Declan Breathnach: Very complex. Anything you go to do... so we understand that. I'm going to hand you over to John, in relation to...

John Byrne: ...welcome everybody. Probably one of your good news stories, and I suppose I have a personal interest, having crossed the canal every day on my way to school many moons ago. But you're the first local authority to receive funding under the Urban Initiative Innovative Action plan. Could you tell us exactly what you're planning and the likely timescale?

Patricia Philbin: Okay. We're doing a number of public realm works at Lombard Street and on Middle Street, so we're getting that ready to go to Part 10 in relation to that. Ceannt Station obviously is one of the big ones; all its funding comes through ourselves. There is the Innovation District in Nun's Island, which is a partnership with the university, so there retrofitting some of their buildings there for occupation. We have the Clifden Railway Bridge, which Derek is managing, and there's a lot of active travel, which is part-funded by URDF and NTA, which Derek manages through the Active Travel Office.

John Byrne: And the plans in relation to the Eglinton Canal—

Patricia Philbin: Eglinton Canal, we did the active travel on that, and that was funded as well, yeah.

Derek Pender: I can briefly run through – so the- what we refer to as our Eglinton Canal Project is concluded. We have, there was a lot of media coverage recently in relation to the NTA withdrawing their support for the

pedestrian and cycling bridge over the-- onto the existing abutment of the old Clifden Railway Line, which connects the Dyke Road area onto the campus of the University of Galway. So, the URDF, in fairness, that was a 50/50 funded project between the NTA and the URDF. The NTA have withdrawn their support for it, whereas the URDF, in fairness have not, and the URDF part of our ability to draw down funds with the URDF is for us to be able to match fund it somehow. So that's what the NTA funding was.

But we have now successfully managed to get development contributions teams funding for Galway City Council to match fund the NTA piece, or the URDF piece. So, what we have agreed to do at this point in time is to bring the project through the statutory consent process, to bring it up to and including planning permission. I'd be very confident at that point, with a successful planning application, that I'll have plenty of suitors in relation to coming forward to actually construct the bridge itself.

John Byrne: Okay. Just another – you have a staff complement there at 684, you seem to be recruiting a lot of the people from the answers we got. Have you a target, or what's the projected staff complement?

Leonard Cleary: Maybe just to, before Patricia comes in, just to say we're following a strategic workforce plan process with the department. It's quite a small staffing complement, 684, for a local authority in comparison to other local authorities, and that was constrained, of course, by the budgetary resources of recent years. So I'll ask Patricia, maybe, to elaborate on the strategic workforce plan, which has gone through the consultation process with the unions but is based on needs in terms of meeting customer service.

Patricia Philbin: Yeah, so our Strategic Workforce Plan is 2024-2029, so we predict that the, going by the interactions we've had over all the teams and the directors and looking at the scale of the work that's coming to us, there's over 900 million worth of projects of investment. We will see the workforce growing by a further 309 by 2029. That's always obviously subject to budget. Since 2022, the workforce has increased by 18.86%. We were starting from a relatively low base, and obviously, we're increasing the teams in terms of Derek's for the

development, our own teams in terms of planning and also in terms of our architects and for Helen's in terms of the challenges we have in terms of ICT. We have submitted it to the department, we did undertake consultation with the unions on it, and they were in agreement with it being submitted to the department. The completeness check is nearly finished. There is just one or two bits on our action plan that we have to confirm with the department, which we expect to do after Easter. So that will be, hopefully get full approval from the department at that stage.

John Byrne: Okay. One other quick question – do you plan to maintain a city centre presence when you move to Crown Square?

Leonard Cleary: Crown Square is just a little over a kilometre from Eyre Square, so I suppose what we're hoping is that the city centre will include Crown Square, as the city grows and develops to the east. We will also, to answer your question straightly, we will expect to have a small customer service desk for those who wish to physically pay a bill in the city centre, so we'll just take a small unit maybe in a retail premises, on a pilot basis to see does the customer really still want to physically come in and pay their parking fine or whatever it is.

I expect the online option would be very attractive for the majority, and Crown Square is serviced by a very good quality bus service, and maybe later on, they'll have an opportunity to outline the quality bus corridor, which will be coming soon.

John Byrne: Thanks, Leonard. Thanks, Chair.

Michael McCarthy: Thank you. We'll move on to Working Group Four.

Margaret Lane: Okay. Hi, I'm Margaret Lane. I chair Working Group Four, which is Financial Management and Performance. And just a standard question, can you outline the governance arrangements or measures that you have in place to give yourself assurance, both financial and operational, in relation to the operation of your subsidiary companies?

Leonard Cleary: So maybe just to mention the subsidiary companies first. So, we have Leisureland in Salthill, which many people will have had family holidays there in Salthill for swimming, etc. And then also, the Port of Galway is now our subsidiary company. We have appointed two of our Directors of Service onto the Port company for good governance. We meet quarterly with the Port company and a similar process where we have nominees onto the Galway Leisureland company.

Both are within our financial planning framework. Regular engagements. Managers are appointed to both. The Chief Executive, in fact, of Galway Port has just completed the seven-year term, so the recruiting process beginning on that again, and we have permanent staff in Leisureland.

Both performing pretty well for the current level, but both Leisureland and Galway Port will need into the future to develop in a whole new way. Leisureland, now reaching the 50-year mark, will need to become a more iconic project delivering for Galway City. Obviously, the swimming piece is important, but it's a very strategic site, and Galway Port has a planning application going through the process with An Coimisiún Pleanála for a major expansion of an outer port facility, and we would hope to regenerate the old port. Maybe did you want to maybe discuss maybe its interaction with our budget and the reference to the budget.

Margaret Lane: Well, I think maybe we have some questions on the financial performance with John. And I suppose it's probably you, I'd say, Helen, really, in terms of unfunded capital debit balances. And I note that the audit report for '24 showed us that there was 41.3 million cumulative debt balance on the capital accounts. And at that stage, you advised that there were ongoing

discussions with the department in relation to reducing that. And I suppose, can you just give me an idea of what progress you've made on reducing it? And what was it at the end of 2025? Roughly.

Helen Kilroy: Okay. I suppose we're just finalising our 2025 accounts at the moment. They're due this afternoon. But I suppose in terms of that €41 million, in terms of the capital accounts, a large part of that is, we would expend money and then recoup it afterwards. So sometimes it looks larger than it is in actual fact. So, the actual unfunded balance is much lower. Off the top of my head, I'm going to say it's about €6 million. That's off the top of my head now, so I could be wrong on that.

The large majority of that relates to legacy unsold affordable houses, and so that's been ongoing discussions between housing and the department for a number of years, and the last time we received some money from the department to fund those was, I think, 2021 or 2022. So again, we're just putting together another kind of application to them to, in an effort that we might get some more funding to reduce that and get it off the balance sheet entirely.

Margaret Lane: And roughly that €6 million, I know you said, how old? What would be the age of that balance? I think it's the number of years on the accounts, is it?

Helen Kilroy: Yeah, they relate to unsold affordable houses, so I think it's from the time of the last crash. I don't have the exact numbers.

Margaret Lane: Which would be 10, 15 years.

Helen Kilroy: Yeah.

Margaret Lane: Okay. And I have one question where I hand you over to John. The internal audit review by NOAC. What's the status of the recommendations for Galway City Council? Have you implemented them?

Helen Kilroy: Yes. So, my main recollection in terms of that those recommendations were in relation to cyber. A point came up about cyber and may have been, I suppose, maybe an interpretation at the time of the question because I suppose we had answered the survey in terms of the internal audit department, and I think the way that the report was then written was more along the lines of the local authority doesn't review kind of the risk of cyber, which is quite different I suppose. But as I say, as I outlined earlier, the internal audit department has done an audit over cyber last year. So, that's now being completed, and then in terms of the other recommendations generally out of the report were in relation to kind of multi-annual plans, audit committee effectiveness, so they're all kind of in progress now.

Margaret Lane: I suppose there's one really important one from a NOAC perspective is that's the independent review of internal audit, and it has been a bugbear for practically all local authorities.

Helen Kilroy: Yes.

Margaret Lane: And I was wondering whether or not you've made any progress. It's a real critical one from an internal control perspective, and especially now when the chief executives are signing off on the statement of internal control. And to kind of have that independent review of internal audit should be giving you a great level of assurance around your internal audit function. And I'm wondering whether or not you've made any headway in terms of getting that independent review of the function?

Helen Kilroy: No, we haven't done an independent review. So, I suppose our internal auditor is part of a network in the north-west region, so he's been liaising with them in terms of what's the best practice to do here. So yeah, no, but from a kind of resources perspective, we haven't progressed that.

Margaret Lane: And I suppose a message from us in relation to that, that that's a critical one for us, and it should be for you, in terms of giving you a level of assurance, considering the reliance that you will be facing on internal audit, when you're signing off your internal controls each year like. So, I think it's something that should get a focus from you.

Leonard Cleary: We'll take that on board.

Margaret Lane: I'll hand you over to John now. Yeah.

John Byrne: Just going back to the harbour company, which Galway City Council wholly owns, it's a significant decrease in the profits of 6.4 million from 2023 to 2024, from 7.8 down to 1.4. Can you give us the reason for that?

Helen Kilroy: Sorry, what company are you talking about?

Margaret Lane: Harbour.

John Byrne: Galway Port.

Helen Kilroy: Oh, sorry, I didn't hear that, sorry. From 2023 to 2024...

John Byrne: It was a 6.4 million.

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, I think maybe just to explain the context, so the Galway Port company... so the Port of Galway now, at this stage, the size of the ships that are trying to access ports, as obviously they're enormous at this stage. So, our port can only take a certain size of ship at this stage, and that's the whole reason the outer port has been developed. So, we are losing business to other ports because of the size of the inner dock, the inner port.

There was also an exceptional year, the one you referenced, in which there was... moving out to sea of a number of wind energy turbine pieces of equipment. And there was a major contract, which I suppose gave a fantastic result in terms of the profit in that particular year.

But I suppose going forward, we'd hope that there would be more of that business. And there is a sporadic new types of business, such as Storm Eowyn, resulted in the export of a lot of timber through Galway Port, because the boats were unable to get through.

Pardon...

Helen Kilroy: Can I just add one?

Leonard Cleary: Sure.

Helen Kilroy: Sorry, there was one anomaly in, was it 2023, you referenced the large profit? So, there was actually a property revaluation undertaken by the port in that year, which led to a large unrealised gain in the profit and loss.

John Byrne: So, just was it the turbines or a decrease in business?..

Helen Kilroy: Well, it's a factor of all of those, but I think that's quite a large differential. It just came to mind there that they did a property re-evaluation in 2023, but since then, there's also been the decline outlined by the Chief Executive.

John Byrne: Can you just answer me one question? What's the difference in ownership between Galway/Salthill Failte, Leisureland and, is described as a subsidiary, and the Galway, or the Port of Galway, which is described as wholly owned? What's the difference?

Patricia Philbin: I suppose Galway/Salthill Failte, the manager of Leisureland, is actually an employee of Galway City Council, and the employees that work there are employees of the company. So, the only transactions for that company are the payment of wages to staff. All this operational costs, etc., comes from the Galway City Council. While we do have a board there, the level of financial transactions responsibility of the board are quite low compared to what the responsibility of the manager is in Galway City Council.

Helen Kilroy: Yep. Also to add to that as well, in terms of Leisureland, we have our own, up to now we have had our own presence on the board between executive and elected members, so we had a certain level of voting rights on the board, whereas up to myself and Derek Pender being appointed to the board of the Port, we did not have voting rights on the Port board.

John Byrne: How many will you have going forward?

Helen Kilroy: So, we will have two directors on the board going forward.

Leonard Cleary: That's it, and as you're probably aware, from the Harbours Act, elected members are prohibited from serving on the Port. And just specifically in relation to the port, all financial transactions it operates as a separate, independent company. The finances do not flow through Galway City Council. They flow through their own accounts and to full autonomy. We're, of course, fully accountable to ourselves.

John Byrne: Okay.

Margaret Lane: Are they not incorporated at all into Galway City accounts? No?

Helen Kilroy: No.

Margaret Lane: Okay, thank you.

Michael McCarthy: Okay, perfect. We'll move onto the final working group with Brian.

Brian Cawley: Great, thank you, Chairman. Good morning again, everybody. So, I just wanted, in terms of the kind of areas that we have responsibility for, explore three different areas. So, generally speaking, we are concerned with issues to do, for example, with service level agreements, leisure centres, public sector duty and implementation of other aspects of national policy. So, I just want to explore a couple of these.

Now, you mentioned previously the public sector duty, and the work you've been doing on that. And indeed, I should have mentioned, corporate plans is another area that comes under our umbrella in terms of what we do, and I think you mentioned it also in the corporate plan, the work that you plan to undertake in relation to public sector duty, and specifically the assessment of where you're at in relation to that.

And as you know, IHREC require that local authorities would look at this area and identify gaps and address those. I note you had a document in October '24, which was an assessment document, I think it's on your website, and I had a look at that; that seems to address kind of mainly generic areas, as opposed to specific areas related to Galway City and the services. So, I just wanted to ask you, where are you at with this? Have you identified specific areas of Galway City Council services that need to be addressed? You know, what progress have you made?

Helen Kilroy: So, I suppose just to outline from the assessment, there's also been, as I said earlier, an implementation plan now also on the website. And we have set up a cross-directorate committee. That committee has not met yet; they will be meeting in April, and they'll be taking that implementation plan and bringing it to life, and there's a representative of each department in there, so there will be real, tangible actions out of that. And you know, from my own reading of the implementation plan, it does touch on every single area within the council, from kind of traveller accommodation down to kind of accessibility in our rec and amenity facilities. So really, it'll take the committee to kind of take that implementation plan and start bringing it to life, but they'll be reporting to the senior management team and to the CPG in terms of their progress.

Brian Cawley: Okay. So, in other words, you have identified specific areas that you need to address.

Helen Kilroy: Well, the areas are outlined in the implementation plan, as I said, and as I said, they touch on every single directorate. So, I couldn't list them all, but as I said, there's traveller accommodation, there's accessibility of our community facilities, our beaches, our parks, our playgrounds, age-friendly action, so there's

quite a number of specific points in that implementation plan. It's quite a lengthy document, so sorry I can't remember it all.

Elizabeth Fanning: Maybe just to add, I suppose, from a housing perspective I suppose we are committed to eliminating discrimination and to promoting equality and protecting human rights, and I suppose we've done that through our TAP, our 2025 to 2029 TAP was published last year, and we would have done an assessment with an expert, Niall Crowley, he's the chair of our LTACC which is fully functioning, he's also the chair of the NTACC and an expert on human rights and equality, so he helped us assess, we sat down and we workshopped it in an afternoon including myself with the team and himself and we assessed that the TAP was compliant with the IHREC, the law and the legislation.

So, we also, the other important thing that we do as a director is we do an awful lot of anti-racism training and anti-discrimination training, which is really, really key. And we continually do that with not just our staff, but with the GTM and also with our elected members. They are constantly doing, not constantly, but we do it two or three times a year, and regular updates on our training in that, which I think is vital as well. So, it's very prevalent in the social development directorate, yes.

Brian Cawley: Great. Thank you. Just to move on to another area, we mentioned service level agreements, and indeed, in the guidelines from the department that were issued about corporate plans, they ask that, you know, service level agreements are referenced in the corporate plan. So I was just looking at your corporate plan; you definitely do mention the service-level agreements with Irish Water. I was wondering are there others? For example, you mentioned Leisureland and others. Are there other service-level agreements that you have in place? For example, with leisure centres or...?

Patricia Philbin: No, we don't have one with Leisureland as such, no. I suppose one we have discussed is the shared services.

Brian Cawley: Okay.

Leonard Cleary: So, maybe just to elaborate on the shared services, then. So, the fire service, the library service, the local enterprise office and the regional enterprise office for the north-west are shared with Galway County Council and other local authorities.

So, I suppose the particular areas, the local enterprise, the fire and the library, we plan to have an SLA with Galway County Council, who are the lead on those particular shared services and we'd probably like to lead in some shared services going forward, new ones ourselves, and have a quarterly review structure and an SLA to be reviewed at that. So, we have set up an engagement process between directors from both local authorities with a view to developing that engagement process and to formalise it in due course in an SLA.

Brian Cawley: Okay.

Derek Pender: Just very briefly, just one that has come to my attention in the last couple of weeks, it hasn't been signed yet, but it is coming down the road, is an SLA between all the CARO offices on the Western Seaboard. So, the Climate Action Regional Offices will be entering into a service-level agreement in the very near future.

Brian Cawley: Okay. I wanted to ask you, because I saw some references to the planned development of an Aquatic Centre at Knocknacarra. So, I just wanted to ask you about that, you know. Where is that at? What role do you have in that, generally, in relation to planned governance, for example, and also in relation to the planned funding of it? So, if you could just maybe elaborate a little bit on that plan and, you know, where you are within that?

Leonard Cleary: ... I suppose, firstly, the Aquatic Centre that's proposed is a Regional Aquatic Centre, and Galway is delighted to host that. The project came to us from a philanthropic and community-based group on a voluntary basis, who proposed the project, asked us to work with them on it and try and access the various department funding as a partnership.

In fact, the project has an investment of major philanthropic funding from a Galway-based business, which will contribute significantly to the match funding. Galway City Council also will be investing in the project financially. And I might maybe hand over to my colleague, the Director of Finance, Helen, in relation to the governance piece, nominees to the board, the project development, the structuring of the funding.

John Byrne: Sorry, Chair, just.. Sorry, Leonard – what do you mean by a Regional Centre? Who gave it that designation?

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, so, for those who are almost professional swimmers or senior amateur swimmers, they have a requirement for a particular type of pool that would be slightly different from the Leisureland and the paddle pool that we might bring our families to. They need a serious set of facilities, and this facility would provide them with that regional space for training to high athletic standards.

John Byrne: So they'll have a portion of time set aside for the elite swimmers, is that the plan?

Leonard Cleary: That's it, yes. So of course...

John Byrne: And are they not using, do they not train locally in Leisureland, no?

Helen Kilroy: There is some swimming locally in Leisureland, but the pool itself is too small for competitive swimming. It's a FINA standard, is the term, and this pool will meet that. It's also three times the width of Leisureland - it's still a 25-meter pool, it's not a 50-meter, but it's three times the width of Leisureland, so it will allow, you know, children's swimming lessons and kind of competitive swimming in, and it can all be sectioned off so it will allow, you know, different types of swimming to..

John Byrne: So Leisureland doesn't meet the criteria for competitive swimming, is that what you're saying?

Leonard Cleary: Leisureland is for a different customer. Leisureland is essentially a family-type swimming pool or leisure swimming pool, whereas the Aquatic Centre is to meet the demands/needs of elite swimmers who need to train around the region and the neighbouring counties. So, in fact, the demand is so high in Leisureland for the first customer group that I described that it's barely coping with that customer demand, and there is a market for an additional service, which the Aquatic Centre will deliver, but it's for the regional counties as well as Galway.

It's bigger than Galway, and we see Galway as an economic driver of the north-west and the west, and in fact a counter pole in due course to the focus on Dublin and the east. We need a strong city in the west, and this is one of the strategic projects that we're working with. So we're working with Minister Patrick O'Donovan and his team in the Department of Sport on the capital funding piece and that, and we have a very positive working relationship and good structured approach to the financial package, which, as I mentioned, will involve greater than €5 million of philanthropic funding to make that project happen. And Galway City Council will be investing in it as well, based on the approval of the elected members who want to invest in it as a regional project.

Derek Pender: Just very, very briefly, Chair. Just in terms of one of the proposed benefits of this project, is that both the leisure and the more competitive piece can coexist at the same time in the pool. So, I wouldn't like a narrative to be thinking that the locals, for instance, cannot get in here.

There's going to be very strict guidelines in terms of access for everybody. But just to reinforce what my colleagues were saying, these activities can coexist at the same time, potentially, in this facility when it gets constructed. And in terms of, you alluded to kind of governance over it, so...

For my troubles, again, I've kind of been appointed potentially to a project execution board on this. So, the function of that will be to provide strategic oversight, governance, to make sure that it complies with the public spending code. We, as a local authority, the funding, the department element of the funding, will

be channelled through Galway City Council. So obviously, we need strong oversight and governance on that. So, we will sit on the board to ensure that basically the project is constructed as it's supposed to be constructed, that it complies with the public spending code and doesn't step outside of that. So, we will have strong governance and presence on that board.

John Byrne: So, will there be elected members on this board or?

Derek Pender: Yes. There was a proposal for two elected members and two members of the executive.

John Byrne: And from the “philanthropist”, they’ll be nominating people onto the...?

Leonard Cleary: Yes.

John Byrne: Sorry, Chair. Will Swim Ireland be nominating people, or Connacht Swimming, or Galway or...?

Leonard Cleary: I'm not sure on the other nominees, because we're invited on the board rather than deciding who goes on. But one of the conditions is...

John Byrne: You were invited onto the board?

Leonard Cleary: We're invited onto the board, and one of the conditions of our investment in it is that we prescribe how many nominees we would have. We're not leading the project.

John Byrne: Oh, so you’re not in control? You’ve been invited onto the board?

Leonard Cleary: We're facilitating the project, yeah. So, this was a community-conceived project, and the community engaged with Galway City Council in order to develop a partnership to access the funding, because of the scale of the project. So, when we were asked to make a financial investment, we had certain conditions in line with that investment, which is that we would be part of the board and that we would have nominees in terms of staff and elected members on it.

John Byrne: And do you have the liability for the ongoing cost of it then? If

it's...

Leonard Cleary: No, the community-owned company will have the operational responsibility. They're leading on the project. We're facilitating the funding for the project, as we do in many partnerships with various community groups.

Michael McCarthy: Can I just.. Before I check in with Declan- Can I just ask, in terms of the funders behind that build, it's the department, the local authority and?

Leonard Cleary: And a philanthropist.

Michael McCarthy: A philanthropist.

Leonard Cleary: Yeah. I'm not sure if I can mention the name in the public forum. I'm happy to do so if you wish.

Declan Breathnach: Just, supplementary to that, is there an agreed percentage in terms of philanthropic contribution, in terms of the overall package, that ensures that the funding package is secured, to make sure that the project proceeds? Is there a pro rata philanthropic, state contribution and local authority contribution?

Helen Kilroy: So, I can give you a breakdown. So, the projected cost of the build is €20 million. There's LSSIF funding of €8 million secured. There's a philanthropic donation of €5 million into the project. And we're currently in ongoing negotiations with Minister O'Donovan's office in terms of finalising the final figures. But at the moment, we're kind of landing on €3.75 million from the local authority and a further €3.25m from the minister's office.

Declan Breathnach: And if – sorry again – if the project, as a lot of these larger projects increase, is there a commitment from all to make sure that the percentage increases accordingly? If they're short-funded, it doesn't end up with the local authority?

Helen Kilroy: Yes, I suppose, that's been discussed with the philanthropic donors. One of the key benefits of the pool is it's using modern methods of construction, which we're hoping will stabilise those costs in terms of the estimates and quotations that they've built their estimates on so far won't run amok, but unfortunately, as we've seen in recent weeks with oil prices driving up, that there is always that risk there. That's all certainly on the table.

Derek Pender: If I may just, I beg your pardon, if I just may offer some form of comfort in that regard. So prior to us at any point or anybody who's spending public money, before they assign a contract with a developer of any description, be it a swimming pool or a house or anything, we will have to go, we're obliged to go back with the latest cost estimate, after the tenders have been submitted to the department.

And let's just say it has gone up 10%, and it's at that point then when the final decision will be made. But if you get department approval at that point, you can go ahead. But it's just.. we're obliged under the Public Spending Code again to identify that there is a potential uplift of 10% over what the original business case was.

John Byrne: Is there a point at which you won't go past? I mean, I know, you know, that negotiations with ministers seem to be a bit topsy-turvy, but has he...

Leonard Cleary: Well, they've been very positive...

John Byrne: But has he committed additional funding?

Leonard Cleary: Well, we have to go through the processes under the Department of Sports, so they're not concluded, so we have to give the Department, I suppose, due process for them to complete...

John Byrne: And the City Council want to raise the additional loan, is that correct?

Leonard Cleary: Yeah, we have the funding in place for it, already raised. Yeah, just to confirm Cathaoirleach, already raised, approved by the elected members and approved for investment in that specific project, following a number of discussions at our plenary council meeting.

John Byrne: Sorry, quick one, just one last question. Is there any other project like this around the country? On the same model?

Leonard Cleary: In terms of an aquatic centre? I'm not familiar with..

John Byrne: No, no, no, not the management part. That you have a local authority being invited onto a board, even though you're the lead with the department with regards to the actual project. Personally, I've never seen anything like it.

Leonard Cleary: The local authorities across the country would participate in a number of community-led companies, for example, the Leader Programme, other family-type services, community-type services, where a community group would lead the project, the local authority may provide a grant to the project, nominate elected members of staff to the board, but the project would be led by the community. Yes, I'd be familiar with a number of projects across the country.

They may not all be significant capital projects; they're more in the community development, that type of service area. But some would involve the development of a community centre or a sports facility linked to a community centre, whereby the local authority would maybe invest or give a grant, but a community group would operate it. I suppose it's important where there is capacity...

John Byrne: And what's the community involved in this?

Leonard Cleary: Pardon?

John Byrne: What is the community group involved in this project?

Helen Kilroy: The name of the group, they've named themselves Forbairt Snámh,

so they're..

John Byrne: And who.. Who are the members of it? Are they people from the Knocknacarra area?

Helen Kilroy: They're from Galway, yeah. The Galway City area. There are people from the Galway City area who are heavily involved in swimming and water polo in the city. So it's a swimming group rather than a community group? Yes, a local swimming group, yep.

Michael McCarthy: Just a question from Miriam there.

Miriam McDonald: Just a point of clarification, because you mentioned at one stage the pool was 25 metres. Is that width or?..

Helen Kilroy: It's 25-metre length, but it's three times the width of what Leisureland is, which, forgive me, I don't know off the top of my head what it is.

Miriam McDonald: But yet you've said that they have to go to Limerick because they need a 50-metre pool. That's where I'm just a bit confused.

Helen Kilroy: Sorry for, what I meant there was for competitive swimming at the moment, they go and use the 50-metre pool in Leisureland. There will still be, I suspect, some requirements for a use of the 50-metre pool in Limerick, but it should, we hope, reduce the reliance on Limerick.

Miriam McDonald: But the Aquatic Centre won't have a 50-metre pool?

Helen Kilroy: Yes. Sorry, maybe I'm not explaining it. They are currently using the pool in Limerick that is 50-metres. In some instances, they may still need a 50-metre pool, but where they don't, they will use the one in Galway. It will reduce the reliance on Limerick, which is what I'm trying to say.

Miriam McDonald: It's just that, you know, normally the professional athletes want a 50-metre pool, so that's what, I'm just, you know, if the purpose of the aquatic centre, I know you clarified that it's not solely for professional athletes, but if they need a 50-metre pool, it's not going to be a 50-metre pool.

Helen Kilroy: In discussion with Swim Ireland, I suppose, the 50-metre pools are

not financially feasible.

Miriam McDonald: Yeah, I mean, there's one in UCD that seems to be working fine.

Helen Kilroy: Probably a bigger population in UCD.

Brian Cawley: I just wanted to finalise, I've one other question after this. But just one final thing that I want to ask you about that in terms of the kind of, leadership and ownership of the Aquatic Centre and Governance. So who decides, who is deciding board membership? In other words, you've said you were invited. Is it the department that invites and establishes the composition of the board? And ultimately, who would chair it? I mean, who would be representing?

Leonard Cleary: Maybe just, Chair, I could clarify again. So, if Galway City Council decided to lead on the Aquatic Centre, we would have to outsource the operation of the facility. We don't have expertise in running Aquatic Centres in-house. So maybe the way to look at the model is that a project, an Aquatic Centre is being developed for the region in the north-west, based in Galway.

We happen to be the local authority in the area and we're certainly encouraging the project. The operating entity is the swim-based community, voluntary company. They will be the operators of the facilities and they will have to operate it commercially. We will participate in that process in a partnership which we are facilitating the department of sport grant as distinct from leading out and building an Aquatic Centre ourselves.

You heard me earlier mention my top 12 priorities, that wasn't one of them, but there are other projects in the city that need to be supported so we're partnering with the company and the entity that want to operate it, in terms of facilitating the capital funding, and we'll be part of the company that operates it but we're not leading it as part of our own budget process.

So I need to clarify with the Chair, can I mention the philanthropist by name? I'm conscious of GDPR and publication of the video afterwards.

Michael McCarthy: Well, it's just the fact that the proceedings are being recorded and will go.. so for that..

Brian Cawley: I don't need to know specific names, but I just need to know who's doing the invitation for this company that you're referring to...

Helen Kilroy: So the, this company, as I said, is called Forbairt Snámh, it's not-for-profit. It's being led, as I said, by a group of local volunteers heavily involved in swimming and water polo. So they have been operating this company up until now, and we are working with them. We will, in due course, have members on the board of directors with that group.

Leonard Cleary: Very important point, of course, the money we're investing is a repayable loan. The company will be repaying the loan to Galway City Council.

Brian Cawley: Okay, I think just to, and we'll finish on this, but I think you can gather from the question that our concern, of course, as I'm sure yours is, is the governance associated, given the investment of taxpayers' money in this project. And that's something, obviously, that we'd be keeping oversight on, as I'm sure you're...

Leonard Cleary: Just to reassure you that on the governance piece, the condition of our loan is around the governance, the directors on the company, two elected members and two directors of service. So we're confident in the governance piece, and we're confident that the lead person who is leading the project from the community group is a very, very large, well-established business in Galway. In fact, internationally, in business acumen.

Brian Cawley: Okay, great. So I just want to move on, my last piece here. I just want to ask you, because you mentioned it a few times, the new corporate headquarters on Crown Square. So, just two, kind of, questions about it. The first one was just, I guess, looking at this new headquarters, and I'm familiar because I've been in Galway City, and I know you're scattered, and have been for a long time, all over the place, so I can get that, the need to consolidate and all that.

But taking account of the fact that you mentioned yourself, the emphasis now on digital services, and you certainly emphasise that very strongly in your corporate plan. And there's new digital strategy for local government that we know about.

So there's the delivery of services digitally, there's working from home. So in that context, I'm just wondering how fit for purpose the new headquarters is in light of the fact that, you know, people may not be, the public members of the public may not be going in to pay their tax, motor tax, or whatever it might be.

Leonard Cleary: So I might ask Derek Pender, who is leading out on the project, to maybe to talk about the standard of the building in terms of energy, etc., and also the various fit-out of the building. Certainly, customers will still be accessing the building; it's also hosting our council chamber and obviously the staff, and then we'll talk a little bit about digital and remote. So maybe Derek might describe the building and the type of building it is.

Derek Pender: First of all, it's going to be one of the first, if not the first, LEED Platinum buildings in the country. There are a number of LEED goals. It will be virtually energy self-sufficient in terms of what you were alluding to, working from home and all that stuff. The building currently has desks. There will be blended working, from home will continue. We currently operate three-day and two-day. work-from-home policy, that will continue.

We've done extensive research in terms of the trending of the attendance at the office. So on a Monday, it's somewhere in the region of 50-55%, slightly higher on a Tuesday, slightly higher on a Wednesday, and then it drops off considerably on a Thursday and Friday. So with the existing workforce that's in the building and with the projected new staff members coming online with the new strategic workforce plan, there's a requirement to have in the vicinity of 340-350 desks at any one time in the building, which we have.

The new design will facilitate that. It's an open plan office to the majority. There's quite an array of collaboration spaces, and other areas where people can get up, go off, have a private telephone conversation in a telephone booth. There's multiple new office space. Two main things that came back from staff surveys, actually back in the day, was not enough office spaces and canteen facilities were inadequate in the current City Hall. So they have both been addressed with the new design. We have recently, in the last three weeks, signed the contract with the fit-out contractor. They're currently on site.

We will have occupancy at, we will be getting the building handed over to us, floor by floor. I expect the first floor to be handed over to us September/October of this

year. It's the intent to have, in my opinion, I would be suggesting that IT and facilities would be the first departments to move up there to make sure that effectively the building is plug and play when the rest of us get there, and I expect the rest of us to be kind of taking occupancy January/February/March of next year.

Brian Cawley: Okay. Yeah. And just to, on the digital services generally. I mean, you say that members of the public will, but have you done any kind of modelling or, you've done some trend analysis in relation to the staff attendance, but what about members of the public accessing the building? The need to access public spaces in the building, given that, you know, things are developing very quickly on the ICT front.

Helen Kilroy: I suppose we haven't done any forecasts on that. In the future, I suppose, it's an ever-evolving space, as I suppose Derek has outlined in terms of the function of the building, that customer service area, and Leonard spoke earlier about how we're streamlining that customer service piece for the new building as well. But the other point is that that kind of area in the ground floor of the building, as you come in, can be a multifunctional space in terms of you know, holding public consultations and other types of public access that we've never been able to do in City Hall, as well as civic events. And Leonard also mentioned there'd be a better fit-for-purpose chamber. At the moment, our chamber just about holds our 18 elected members and us as directors. There's very limited room for media or any kind of public, coming in to view the meetings. So, you know, the new site will facilitate all of that.

Derek Pender: And maybe just, and I don't know if this is what you're getting at as well. So, prior to us taking occupation of that building, there will be a huge communication strategy across the city for members of the public. So we will be, radio, print media, etcetera, basically explaining to people how they can get to the building in terms of bus corridors. It's very well connected in terms of there's two public bus routes that stop right outside the door. So there will be a whole mobility plan as well, which will be well communicated before occupation of the building.

Brian Cawley: No, I can see that. But I can see obviously that there's a bit of a challenge as well, that you're trying to communicate that you're going digital. And at the same time, you're trying to communicate that people, you know, we're in a new place and come on down, and that's one that I'm sure...

The final thing I just wanted to ask you about that is the valuation of the building. And, you know, there has been a report about a drop in the valuation. I think it was 7 million was the figure I'd read from the original valuation. Could you just explain something about that? Was there an independent valuation carried out? When was that carried out in relation to the building and the purchase of the building?

Helen Kilroy: Yep, so, I suppose the building was purchased back in 2022, and there was an independent valuation done before, you know, as part of our due diligence, due diligence exercise, as part of that acquisition, and the price paid came in within the valuation range provided at the time. The valuer was invited back then at the request of the elected members to do an up-to-date valuation, and we got a second valuation done then, and that was about mid-last year.

And I suppose, look, the point, we had a special meeting about it last year and discussed it with our elected members. The world, I suppose, is ever changing in terms of corporate office space and in terms of property valuations. We bought this property to hold it for the long term. We weren't going to put it back on the market last year, and I guess the valuation is there, seen as a valuation done in the open market, what someone would come and pay for it at that point in time. It's extremely subjective, you know, it was looking at those valuations looked at commercial property nationally, and I suppose in Galway City, we have a particular issue with new commercial property. There is Crown Square, where we're moving, to and there's another area in the city, are the only two areas of new commercial office builds in recent history. So those valuations did not factor that into play, that a lot of the office space currently in Galway City is old and not fit for purpose.

At the time of the acquisition, we also evaluated a number of options. So we evaluated staying in City Hall and renovating it, renting additional space, getting a new site and building something from scratch. All those options were looked at, and at that time, this option was seen as the best value for money.

Again, we revisited that last year in advance of our special meeting, and those numbers still stacked up. In fact, they stacked up more so, because looking at the retrofit option for our existing building in City Hall, because building standards and climate action standards have changed since 2022, the cost of doing that was retrofitting our existing and extending City Hall would have been astronomical.

We worked out that it probably saved about 60 million in terms of the move to Crown Square...

Michael McCarthy: So if you had stayed, you would have had to do an upgrade, an extension, versus purchasing Crown Square, the difference would be probably €60 million?

Helen Kilroy: And the reason for that is because if we were to retrofit and extend City Hall we would have to move our staff out to do that, and the only place to do that is Crown Square, so we would have had to move them to Crown Square, rent Crown Square for several years, sorry take out a lease in Crown Square, fit it out, albeit maybe not to this same standard as a permanent fitout, fit it out, move there, rent there for kind of five to seven years, as long as it would take us to retrofit and extend City Hall, and then move back. So not only was it more costly, it's extremely disruptive to services as well.

Derek Pender: On top of that, when you actually move back, the way that the commercial sector works, you have to leave the shell for the building the way it was when you walked in there. So not only would we have to fit out the building, except not to the same standard as what we're doing, but it would be fitted out nonetheless, and then fit it all out to move back in.

Leonard Cleary: Chair, can I maybe just add to that? As well as saving the €60 million by purchasing Crown Square and going for the cheaper option that we went for, we now will be left with an asset, which is a four-acre site where the existing HQ is in the city centre. which is a huge commercial opportunity for us to generate revenue.

So, in addition to €60 million being saved, we now have a revenue generator of a four-acre site, and we have major opportunities commercially there now to generate some funds for Galway City Council, in order to fund the delivery of services to customers. And it's important that we lead out on that particular site. We're developing a master plan for it.

Four acres is a significant site if it was to be assembled by any developer in a city centre. So there's a great opportunity for us there. Our own building in the 2019 report, it was deemed not fit for purpose. It's a rabbit warren of small little offices, and long corridors, and dark buildings. It's fit for demolition, so that's we would be left in with, a brownfield site, which creates a great opportunity for us. And we

would like to get a bit of height into the city, it's quite low, so we need, through our planning process and proper planning, to give an opportunity there now for some significant iconic buildings to be fitted on that four-acre site, which is just off Eyre Square.

Patrick Greene: Just to back it up, as I suppose I was a part of it early on. When we were looking back at this, looking at the four options and the rest of it, since that we've actually hired another office, and we've moved the Active Travel Team down there, two years ago. We've increased the workforce as you mentioned earlier, because you were referring to it earlier. We've started spending the URDF and all the rest of it.

So the whole point of buying this building originally was to enable Galway City Council to move forward and deliver its projects. And we knew the funding was there, and we knew the team would increase. We're now already at a position in City Hall, where we're full. And even though we're on two days a week working from home, where a position can go from home, we're still full. And so we're only pressure for seats again. This building is an enabler to bring Galway forward. And that is certainly the case since we've started hiring, and we can see the movement. So that's really important, I suppose, the why it was done in the first place. Climate change was a second piece of it, because this building will be a LEED Gold Building, which is one of the highest standards in the country. And the complex is LEED Gold, so we'll be matching that as well. That's another very important point. So that helps us with our whole Climate Action Plan as well, to actually lower our numbers.

Michael McCarthy: Yeah, Declan.

Declan Breathnach: Just a final one... Galway City has always had problems with traffic. One of the effects of a medieval city. My question is very simple; short term, what are you doing, other than the wider plan being Bus Connects and the bypass and whatever. What are you doing short-term to improve the situation, bearing in mind, I understand that there was a large allocation of money to Galway City and County for bus shelters.

And I understand that most of it was not spent or taken up. Could you comment in that context of what you're doing, you mentioned customers and I fully agree, your customer centric and I understand that. If there is a situation why you're not

able to draw down the money, or maybe I haven't phrased the question correct. My understanding is that a 150,000 of that has been drawn down by one of the local authorities but none drawn down by yourselves.

Leonard Cleary: So, through the Chair, I might maybe start with the last question. Just on the bus shelters issue, we're contracting that out. We were enabling or endeavouring to deal with it in-house in terms of our own resources, but our staffing levels were too low to deal with it through our own crews. We've now decided to contract it out, so I can assure you we will draw down absolutely every piece that's allocated. But it was just at the turn of the year, the money wasn't drawn down, but we're going out to tender now for the contract. We have to outsource it for capacity reasons, and we will absolutely draw down every penny and a whole new suite of bus shelters.

I might ask maybe Derek Pender to say a little bit on active travel, the Ring Road, the Bus Connects, and some of the park and ride proposals that we're working on the NTA with, and the good working relationship we have with the NTA.

Derek Pender: Thanks, Chief. So I wouldn't like it to be thought that there's no bus stops or bus shelters going in in Galway at all. So there's actually two distinct streams of funding. So we have what's called the Bus Network Enhancement Programme, which are brand-new bus stops, brand-new bus shelters on existing routes within the city.

Then we have our active travel and public transport schemes, which are developing bus corridors, active travel schemes all throughout the city. And as part of those contracts, there's bus stops going in everywhere. So, for instance, we have currently under construction the Ballybane-Castlepark scheme. I think there is 16 bus stops and shelters gone in there. We have Bóthar Stiofáin is under construction. There's another four or five gone in there.

We have the Western Distributor Road is going to construction later in this year. There will be another 10 or 12 there, so. Under the existing capital programme, there are bus stops and bus shelters going in everywhere. The Bus Network Redesign piece, which we're waiting for the NTA to finalise, that's the monies that you're referring to, in that there's no drawdown there, but we are going out to tender for it. We're going to use external contractors in relation to that. So there are bus stops and shelters going in in Galway.

What are we doing in the short term? I mentioned a few of those schemes. So we're currently rolling out the Galway Transportation Strategy. That's a strategy that was agreed between ourselves, the NTA, Galway County Council and TII back in 2016. Contained within that is a multitude, a suite of projects all across the city, of which the Ring Road is one of them. The Cross City Bus Connects is another. The Dublin Road Bus Connects is another. The Ballybane-Castlepark Scheme I referred to. The Western Distributor Road. These are all projects that ultimately will help. The Ring Road is the facilitator and the enabler for all of these other pieces to work efficiently. You have pedestrians, cyclists, cars, vans, HGVs, buses in a medieval city all competing for the same square inch. We have to separate them. We have no choice. We have to get people out of their cars, and we have to separate them. So that's what all the active travel schemes are for. That's what all the public transport schemes are for. We need to get the cars and the vehicles, not just cars, but the

vehicles that don't need to be in the city need to get out.

People still refer to the Ring Road as a bypass. It's not a bypass. It's much more than that. It's a very strategic piece of infrastructure that delivers strategic traffic to strategic locations around the city. So there is going to be two dedicated junctions into the Parkmore area where we have, I'd say, upwards of 12,000 or 13,000 people a day coming in there. You'll be able to get directly to all the universities as a result of this. With the Bus Connects, which are very close. The Dublin Road Bus Corridor, I can't remember a project in Galway in recent memory that has not been JR'd. The Dublin Road Bus Corridor has not been JR'd.

The Cross City Corridor from the front gate of the University Hospital, in through and around Eyre Square and down to the Huntsman, is in the courts. The JRs were heard prior to Christmas. We're expecting a positive outcome from that in the coming weeks. So then, with the Ring Road, we will then have a dedicated, two dedicated bus corridors from the front gate of University College Hospital, down University Road, in around Eyre Square, down to the Huntsman, all the way out the Dublin Road to the clinic. So you'll be connecting all three hospitals, the two universities, and all the major pieces of employment will be along that dedicated bus corridor.

So we're very close to achieving what we need to achieve. But the Ring Road is the enabler and the facilitator for all those other things to happen, because we need to get cars and other vehicles out of the city centre.

John Byrne: What's the plan B?

Derek Pender: Keep rolling out the GTS. So, Plan B, that's a very good question. So currently, we're rolling out the GTS. The GTS is to be upgraded to the GMATS, the Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Study. So the GMATS is currently in draft format. It's not going to be pushed forward until such time as a decision has been made on the Ring Road. We're expecting a decision, be it positive or negative, on the Ring Road. It's imminent, if you're to believe the rumours. So at that point, then, the GMATs will be brought forward. But again, the GMATs is another policy document that's going to take 20 years to implement. If we can get the GTS implemented, Galway will be in a much better position than it has been for the last 20 years.

John Byrne: Sorry, Chair, one last question.

Michael McCarthy: Yes. That's your eighth "one last question".

John Byrne: That's a separate issue.

John Byrne: The Local Government Auditors' Report in relation to a Garda investigation ongoing since 2017. Must qualify as a cold case at this stage. Can you give us an update? Or what this is in relation to?

Patricia Philbin: It's still actively under investigation by An Garda Síochána.

John Byrne: Nine years later?

Patricia Philbin: Yes, it is.

Leonard Cleary: I suppose just to reassure the Chair and the members that we're cooperating fully with An Garda Síochána.

John Byrne: I see that, it must be a huge case, is it?

Leonard Cleary: I suppose all we can do is work with An Garda Síochána. We can reassure that we followed our procedures and our policies in relation to the issue that arose, and An Garda Síochána have been very cooperative and helpful. I acknowledge the time frame involved, but that's beyond our control. Obviously, there are individual circumstances relating to the timeline. Maybe that's as far as I could go, Chair, on it. But certainly we're available to cooperate fully with the Gardaí who have tried to progress the case.

Thankfully, the issue was discovered, dealt with, addressed, moved on, and corrective measures put in place to deal with it going forward. So thanks, thanks, John, for the question.

Declan Breathnach: Just in the general aspect of you talking about phishing and scamming and all the rest, I'll add to what John has asked there. Have you had much experience of that type of fraud within your local authority, and maybe more importantly, is there anything that you can tell us as a board that we need to be aware of, in terms of issues that may be pertinent to the work of NOAC?

Leonard Cleary: Not specifically any issues in relation to fraud or scamming or phishing, those kinds of areas. We mentioned earlier that we had put in place the

staff. Just maybe a challenge, maybe from a NOAC perspective, just looking at our finances, just in terms of our funding models. So we see Galway City Council, as I said earlier, as an economic driver for the West. But in order to fulfil that economic driver role, we do need to be funded appropriately. And we do see ourselves as different from rural local authorities.

Obviously, there is a structured approach to funding of local government. We have been working very, very closely with the Department of Housing and Local Government, who have been very helpful to us in trying to progress our funding model. We do have a specific challenge, and I suppose in the area of baseline funding, so I'd ask our Director of Finance in a moment to refer to our baseline funding challenge.

If we're to fulfil that economic driver role, then we need to be treated as that economic driver for the West. In terms of our own housekeeping, we had some to do. The rates weren't increased for a decade. We've now achieved a 9% rates increase, and I'm hopeful for the next budget. We have dealt with our local property tax in terms of 15% increase, and again, to acknowledge the support of the elected members for those difficult political decisions, but they made them, and they made them for the five years in terms of the LPT.

An executive function is to deal with social housing rents. I have increased social housing rents from 17% to 20%, and we're also carrying out a global rent review, and that funding will be reinvested, obviously, in the housing services, and we discussed earlier turnaround times. with vacant tenancies, etc.

So we have our homework done in terms of what's within our gift to do as a local authority, but we do need some national help in terms of the baseline funding. So maybe ask the Director of Finance to outline that, but I do want to acknowledge the department has been very, very supportive to us.

Helen Kilroy: Yeah, I suppose in terms of that baseline, it's quite simple. We have the lowest baseline in the country by a long shot. Our baseline is five million, as calculated by the department, and the next highest is nine million.

We're at a bit of a loss as to that four-million differential and why that exists. And on top of that, not only is it a low baseline, but that results in 20% of the yield of local property tax that's paid by the citizens of Galway City going back into

equalisation funding out to other local authorities.

So we've drafted up a business case that we'll be bringing to our next plenary meeting and subsequently submitting to Minister Brown, recommending a comprehensive review of that funding model and basically looking at the weighting applied to that local government fund in terms of the calculation.

It's based on KPIs such as size, population, so obviously in those regards we don't fare well, but it's not factoring in what the chief has said there in terms of strategic objectives. We're an economic driver in the West, the National Planning Framework, so really, at the very best, we'd like to keep our full yield, but obviously, we think we require a surplus top-up on top of that as well.

And in addition to the funding, the baseline funding, we're also prepared a business case in terms of a tourist tax. We'd like to ask the government nationally to look at bringing in legislation that would allow us to levy a tourist tax in Galway. We actually think we'd be a good, I know the Dublin local authorities have been talking about it as well, we think Galway would be a great pilot model for it. And because we're small, we can do it there without really impacting a bigger market like Dublin.

And look, that's down to the burden of funding, community services, and infrastructure shouldn't all fall on the rate payer. You know we get 2.4 million tourists every year into Galway, and you know anywhere else you travel in the OECD, now it's almost common practice. There was some people travelling to the States here recently for Saint Patrick's Day, and there's talk of you know \$35 a night tourist taxes over there. In Europe, it's more like maybe a couple of euro a night, between kind of France or Italy. So it's common practice now. They've even brought it in in many places across England and Scotland. So something like that, even a €1 a night bed tax in Galway, just in hotels, could generate €2 million a year for us.

Michael McCarthy: We'll duly finish on this comment. Is there anything else that you may think, that you can think of that might be relevant to our role in terms of looking at scrutiny from a Galway City perspective? In other words, is there anything we haven't covered that you think we should be aware of?

Leonard Cleary: Nothing negative, so I might present a positive. Just to acknowledge, I touched on it in my opening statement, so obviously, there was the discussion about Galway County and Galway City, a question as to whether an

amalgamation would be a more efficient model. So the government made a national decision on that, and that's the decision at a national policy level.

So the approach we've taken is that Galway City and Galway County Council work closely together. I might use the phrase hand in glove. So we collaborate, we cooperate closely. It's one Galway, city and county together. The customer doesn't really mind whether the boundary is in the city or the county. They just want a service. So we have tried to work very, very closely with that through my colleague, Chief Executive Liam Connelly in the County, and all his Directors of Services on his management team. So just to acknowledge that's a positive for Galway, and we'll embrace whatever model government decides in the future. But for now, it's collaboration and cooperation, and happy to drive that model forward.

So, go raibh maith agat, a chathaoirligh, and to the members.

Michael McCarthy: Thank you, Leonard, to yourself and the team. It's much appreciated, thank you.