

Piltown Voters Prove Slightly Less Volatile

CARRIGEEN'S Pat Dunphy (Fine Gael) gained the most first preferences in the Piltown Electoral Area, which saw two changes in membership following last Saturday's Local Election. In a 12-candidate race, a total valid poll of 9,658 votes were cast from a total electorate of 17,578, with the quota coming in at 1364. Some nine hours passed before the first count was made public. It later emerged that boxes from polling stations in Slieverue and Mooncoin had gone missing but they were thankfully located. Cllr Dunphy topped the first preference poll with 1222 numbers ones, just one more than surprise package Melissa O'Neill of Sinn Féin on 1221. The next four candidates in terms of first preferences were as follows: Tomás Breathnach (Labour - 975), Eamon Aylward (Fianna Fáil - 921), Fidelis Doherty (Fine Gael - 885) and Ger Frisby (Fianna Fáil - 700). Ultimately, all six were elected, which meant Cllr Cora Long (FF) lost her seat after the eighth count while Ann Marie Irish (FG) hadn't sought re-election. After the count at the Springhill Court Hotel on Saturday evening, Labour's Tomás Breathnach was still standing after taking a drop in his first preference votes from last time out. However, he's still standing and although not over confident, he felt he had enough in 975 votes to retain the seat and he did so, being elected on the 10th count with a total vote of 1,349. But the big news at the count centre, as it was nationwide as well, was the strong showing of Sinn Féin as Melissa O'Neill from Abbeylands in Ferrybank, and a single parent with two children Chloe and Shane, recorded a huge first preference vote of 1221. Ms O'Neill confessed her shock and delight with her showing, having only entered the campaign three weeks ago. Involved in a lot of community work in the Ferrybank area which has a total electoral population of nearly 3,000 votes, obviously she had done her homework and done so very well. A native of Bruff, Co Limerick, Melissa O'Neill said: "We heard a lot of cries for help on the doorsteps in the last Seán Maher reports few weeks. They feel that they've been rejected by the mainstream parties and wanted to see change when it came to medical cards and housing in particular." She was elected in the fifth count, joining Cllr Dunphy in being the first two to win election to Kilkenny County Council. First time candidate Ger Frisby proved something of a surprise winner in the Fianna Fáil camp. He had not been involved in politics before, although his father Michael had contested a local government election all of 30 years ago. Coming from a business background and also an active official within Slieverue GAA Club, he was only hopeful after his first preference 700 votes, he conceded that some of his party colleagues would benefit more from transfers. However, it was he who benefited after he emerged as a winning candidate on the 10th count. Both he and his family, including parents Michael and Lily, were delighted with the outcome. Cllr Frisby, like Cllr O'Neill, had a mobile and energised team of canvassers working on their behalves and both will bring a fresh voice to the same general area that they represent. He'll be joined in Council chambers by Fianna Fáil colleague Eamon Aylward, who garnered 921 first preference votes, thus doing more than enough to retain his seat, which keeps a famous South Kilkenny political name in active service after the retirement of his MEP uncle Liam. Cllr Fidelis Doherty (FG) based in Ballyfacey, Glenmore was somewhat squeezed in by other candidates district wise but still emerged with an impressive 885 first preference votes. Cllr Doherty put in a lot of footwork in the months and weeks up to the election and had identified many social issues like medical cards very early into the campaign. The other big development in this election was the departure of Cora Long (FF - 579 first preferences) from the County Council, who was eliminated after the eighth count. There were also decent albeit unsuccessful showings from Piltown's John Burke (Ind- 576 first preferences), former councillor John Maher (FG - 612 first preferences) while Fine Gael's Fintan Byrne earned 406 numbers ones, with Paddy Gaule winning 556 votes.

Seán Maher