

Merged Council needs to be more inclusive

We attended the historic meeting of the new merged Waterford City and County Council in City Hall on Friday.

We thought it would have been a relatively tame matter as is the tradition with such occasion, with the time-honoured plaudits to be offered to the newly elected Chairman from the pact.

And while non-pact members were generous in their praise, this all changed when votes were taken to nominate committee members. Attitudes changed and drama ensued.

As an independent observer, we felt there was no need for there to be an argument of any kind about appointing opposition members to certain committee members, but the Fianna Fáil/Fine Gael/Labour pact wanted total control, offering nothing to the non-pact members.

Clearly, irrespective of one's political allegiances, and bearing the breakdown of the vote between city and county on May 23rd, this represented an inauspicious start for the new body.

Why did the pact opt to exercise such power, at a time when all Waterfordians ought to be pulling together for the greater good: the betterment of our city and county?

There ought to have been greater inclusiveness in the cultural and education committees, such as there was in the past, but it appears that the pact was intent on isolating the Independent Councillors.

Sinn Féin, which had signalled its intention to stay out of a Council pact at the count centre on May 24th, while disappointed with Friday's outcome, created less fuss than some Independent members, who appeared sore with the way the dice rolled.

As one Sinn Féin member put it, had matters proceeded like this in Belfast, there would have been an *an be outcry*.

A new Council with a greater divergence in terms of how the city and county electorates voted, should have had co-operation at the top of its agenda from day one, all the more so given the Bausch & Lomb news which had broken the previous week.

Surely it would be better for the image of Waterford, be one living in Cheekpoint, Cherrymount or Cappoquin, to have a genuinely united council, with job creation and attracting new investment dominating its 'To Do' list?

We need, and it's fair to state that the people of Waterford, are now demanding a more inclusive Council with a more inclusive approach.

An interesting piece by Kathy Sheridan in last weekend's Irish Times focused on Waterford and highlighted some of its weaknesses, with the author stating that the city has been "forced to take a hard look at itself".

But it also highlighted the can-do attitude of City and County Manager Michael Walsh and the resilience which projects

including the Michael Street garden suggest is still in evidence here on Suirside.

The exchange of political insults might make for good copy, but this newspaper would much prefer to see politicians working together for the common good, rather than running a lengthy series of 'House Divided' pieces.

As Council Chairman James Tobin of Knockanore put it, we need to present a better picture of Waterford to the outside world in an attempt to regain lost ground.

We need to have common goals, common motivations and a common ambition: surely that is worth more than every political point that's available to score at present?