

Clarification needed on the Mayoral issue

On Friday, May 24th, people in Waterford city and county will go to the polls where they will be asked to cast their votes on four separate matters. There will be the European Elections to choose our MEPs, the Local Elections to choose our City and County councillors and two referenda. One will be to determine the length of time for an Irish divorce to become final. At present, it is four years and the alternative being presented is two years.



Mary O'Halloran who made history when in 2007, she became the first woman to hold the office of Mayor of Waterford.

Then, and this is a very big question, we will be asked if we would like to have directly elected mayors. At present, the elected councillors choose a mayor from their own ranks and it all boils down to party majorities. If Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael hold a majority in the council chamber, they can pick four mayors for the duration of the council from their own ranks.

In recent years in Waterford, mayoral pacts have been formed between various parties and/or Independents to control the process.

And now we are being asked if we would like to bypass the council and directly vote in a mayor for four years ourselves.

The problem is, if we vote for a directly elected mayor in the future, we don't know what kind of mayor he/she might be.

The current thinking gives two options. One is to establish a directly elected mayor with no extra powers. They would be largely ceremonial positions similar to the current status of Council Mayors or Cathaoirligh.

The other option is for executive mayors who would take on some of the functions of the Chief Executive or County Manager. To me, that opens up all sorts of difficult situations and, on the face of it, would appear to be a launchpad for confrontation. What if an executive mayor and a manager disagree on an important matter? Who takes the final decision? There is still plenty of time before May 24th for the government to tease out and explain to voters what exactly they might be voting for.

Obviously, Brexit is taking up everybody's time and attention at present but clarification of the mayoral issue is important.