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FG councillors split on leadership

'People are stabbing Enda in the back' – McGreal

■ Paul Healy

Fine Gael councillors in County Roscommon are divided on the question of the leadership of the party which has surfaced in such dramatic fashion in recent weeks. The Roscommon People spoke to all eleven local Fine Gael councillors on Wednesday. While a number of them were understandably a little hesitant to comment in detail – bearing in mind that the party will vote on Enda Kenny's leadership today (Thursday) – it was fairly clear where loyalties lie. Clearly supporting Enda Kenny are Cllrs. Michael McGreal and Michael Creaton, while Cllr. Liam Callaghan also seems to be in the 'Kenny camp'. Supporting a change of leadership, but invariably less than enthusiastic about the timing of the challenge, are Cllrs. Domnick Connolly, Laurence Fallon, Ollie Moore and John Naughten. Cllrs. Gerry Garvey and Ernie Keenan both emphasised their admiration for Enda Kenny without directly stating that he should remain on. Cllr. Sean Beirne is also playing his cards close to his chest, or, as he puts it, is willing to stand by the decision of the Parliamentary Party.

Laurence Fallon

"Once we got to this stage, it's difficult for Enda Kenny to regain credibility within the party. Once nine or ten of his most trusted people leave...it's not good. I have enormous respect for Kenny and the job he has done; having listened to him on a number of occasions in small groups, he was exceptionally talented and very capable. My view not reflected across the wider public however. His rating has been trailing that of the party, consistently. The captain of the team should have a higher rating than the team he is playing with. The public didn't see Kenny as a very credible Taoiseach. I don't see any option other than a change leader."

Domnick Connolly

"I'm very disappointed for Enda, he's a very nice man. He has been a great leader for Fine Gael over the past eight years. Probably the thinking is that it's time to move on to a new leader and freshen up the front bench. Some of the front bench were not pulling their weight. Now that we are where we are, it's probably time for change."

Sean Beirne

"It's unfortunate that this decision has to be taken at this time, but one has to be taken. It's up to the parliamentary party now. My own view is that at this point in time it would seem that the growth of the Labour Party is a major factor in this. That growth has been achieved without any policies, Labour have just been going with the popular train of thought, associating Fianna Fail with the banks, etc. Fine Gael are not able to articulate a similar view.



Cllr. Laurence Fallon, Deputy Denis Naughten, Fine Gael Leader, Enda Kenny and Cllr. Domnick Connolly on the canvass trail during the Lisbon Treaty campaign last September.

It's time to prepare the party for the general election and if that requires a change of leader, then I will support that. I will place my faith in the wisdom of the parliamentary party. I still believe Fine Gael will definitely lead the next Government; the next three elections will all be about the economy."

Michael Creaton

"I think Fine Gael have been very foolish to get involved in this at this stage, especially given the state that Fianna Fail is in. Enda has done very well as our leader. Denis Naughten has taken his own decision and that's his business. I am disappointed in Richard Bruton. I am a firm supporter of Enda Kenny and hope he survives, but whatever happens, the party is damaged."

Liam Callaghan

"I am very surprised with the timing of the vote of no confidence in Enda Kenny. After the departure of George Lee from the party, I felt that any issue with the leadership of the party was dealt with on that occasion. Since being elected leader to the party Enda has worked tirelessly to re-ignite the party and it is unfortunate at this stage that Fine Gael has moved the focus from being the next Government party to finding itself in a leadership struggle. Indeed, it is only two weeks since the party leader attended a Social in Scotts' pub where he left a lasting impression on all those present."

Ernie Keenan

"I'm a supporter of Enda Kenny, he has brought us this far. I will await the outcome of the meeting with great interest."

Ollie Moore

"I acknowledge all that Enda has done over the last eight years. He has put in trojan work. He turned things around. It was a great achievement, but he wasn't been supported by the public, they didn't see him as an alternative Taoiseach. I feel sorry for Enda in the way it has happened but we could ignore all

of the opinion polls. There have been vibes there from the public which we could not ignore."

Gerry Garvey

"The timing is bad. I think if Enda had a chance to become Taoiseach he would have made a good Taoiseach. I think Richard Bruton, if successful, will also make a good Taoiseach."

John Naughten

"It was a tough decision on Denis's part no matter what happened. Denis has outlined his position and while Enda has done great work and served the party well at this point I think it is time for change to advance the party ahead of the next election. It is important that we abide by the decision of the party on Thursday."

Michael McGreal

"People are stabbing Enda Kenny in the back. My position is that Enda has been excellent, he has a great electoral record. We had the near-certainty of a West of Ireland Taoiseach. There is a danger now that this will not happen. Fine Gael should keep Enda Kenny as leader. The ability of some of those people on the front bench could be overestimated in my view. As for Denis Naughten's position, I respect the views of both our TDs but Denis's view is not mine. I represented the 13 counties of the BMW area for many years and it's patently obvious that we need political influence for the advancement of, for example, infrastructural improvements in the West. As I speak to you (Wednesday) I am preparing to meet Transport Minister Noel Dempsey regarding the Western Rail Corridor...work on the rail plan is stalled at Athenry and we need to find out what the bloody hell is happening. If Enda was Taoiseach it would be advanced. We need Enda Kenny as Taoiseach in order for the West to get its fair share. Of course the Dublin media is driving this."

Extra funding for local schools

News that funding has been approved for two schools was welcomed this week by Minister Michael Finneran.

Roof work is now to be carried out on the CBS Roscommon and floor replacement, damp treatment and insulation works at Kiltveean NS.

"The Building Unit from the Department will be in contact with the Boards of Management shortly on this matter," concluded Minister Finneran TD.