

# It's Mayor 'Ming' after Council coup

■ Pauline Scott

Monday's AGM of Roscommon County Council is expected to be explosive following the announcement yesterday (Wednesday) that the Fianna Fáil/Independent alliance in the Council has broken down in favour of a Fine Gael/HAC/Sinn Féin/Independent deal brokered by the HAC in recent days.

Labour Councillor John Kelly had been expected to take up the position of Mayor under the previous deal on Monday, but it now looks as if Cllr. Luke 'Ming' Flanagan will become Mayor on Monday next, with the remaining three Mayoral positions until the next local election going to Fine Gael councillors.

The new deal came about after the Hospital Action Committee suggested at a public meeting that Independent councillors should withdraw from the deal if assurances from Fianna Fáil on the future of Roscommon County Hospital were not forthcoming. After the meeting, the HAC approached Fine Gael and then the Independent councillors in an attempt to broker a deal. The breakthrough came on Sunday when Cllr. Luke 'Ming' Flanagan sought assurances from Fianna Fáil on both the hospital and turf cutting issues, which were not forthcoming and he then withdrew from the Fianna Fáil/Independent alliance.

Speaking at a press

## Finneran won't attend HAC public meeting

Minister Michael Finneran won't be attending any public meeting arranged by the HAC, it was stated at a press conference at Roscommon County Hospital on Wednesday.

A letter to Roscommon Hospital Action Committee from the Minister was read by HAC Chairman John McDermott. In it Minister Michael Finneran stated that he does "not propose to be involved in a public meeting arranged by the HAC" and stated that he will meet with the HAC as he has done on previous occasions.

Mr. McDermott pointed out that the HAC has not met Minister Finneran in recent months. "Over the last six months I haven't even got a reply to phone calls." Speaking of the arrangement of meeting Minister Finneran, Mr. McDermott said, "While it worked well for a while, it has not worked well in the last six months".



**10 reasons to be happy ..**

Councillors Liam Callaghan, Laurence Fallon, Paula McNamara, Domnick Connolly, Michael Mulligan, Luke Ming Flanagan, Ollie Moore, Paula McNamara, Michael Creighton and Sean Beirne pictured on Wednesday evening. Picture: Mick McCormack.

conference at Roscommon County Hospital on Tuesday afternoon, John McDermott, Chairman of the HAC said, "We went to Fianna Fáil looking for an undertaking that services at Roscommon County Hospital would not be withdrawn and we were unable to get that."

Fine Gael councillor Domnick Connolly described the new coalition as "an alliance against the downgrading of services

at Roscommon County Hospital". When it was put to Cllr. Connolly that Fine Gael at national level has expressed reservations about entering into coalition with Sinn Féin, he replied, "We would go to bed with the devil to save the hospital." Cllr. Sean Beirne said, "Whatever about Fine Gael, we are Roscommon people first and our intention is to have services at Ros-

common County Hospital retained". Cllr. Michael Mulligan said, "As far as I am concerned there is no hassle at nay level working together. We work together on different committees".

Ms. Una Ní Chuinn of the HAC stated, "The HAC has looked at every way to put pressure on to retain the services at Roscommon. This is a new angle to put pressure on people making decisions, to make them realise that

we will not stand for any downgrading. We are not going to let this hospital go because there is a recession, we should be able to retain basic services at Roscommon and not be at the beck and call of bigger centres like Galway."

Wednesday's change of power in Roscommon County Council means that only one county council in the country is now led by a Fianna Fáil-led coalition, the Taoiseach's

home county of Offaly.

Fianna Fáil Cllr. Paddy Kilduff told the People: "I am very disappointed with Cllrs. Mulligan and Flanagan but I wish the new alliance well. It will be interesting to see two Ballaghaderreen area council-

lors voting against a local man (Cllr. Kelly) when we nominate him for Mayor on Monday. We will nominate Cllr. Kelly, as agreed. The remaining members of our alliance are staying loyal to our agreement."

## 'Denis Naughten is behind this' – Kelly

Cllr. John Kelly this week hit out at fellow councillors Luke 'Ming' Flanagan and Cllr. Michael Mulligan after they opted out of a coalition deal for power on Roscommon County Council and switched their allegiance to a Fine Gael led-coalition, saying "Mé féin and Sinn Féin have won the day".

He was also critical of Fine Gael TD Denis Naughten who he alleged was behind the deal from the start. Speaking to Roscommon People on Wednesday evening, he said, "I am disappointed because we were in an agreement where I was meant to be Mayor of Roscommon from Monday onwards. Nothing about the agreement has changed since it was made and two members have decided to shaft me."

"I know that Denis Naughten was behind this from the very start. At the public meeting organised by the HAC, reference was made by HAC Chairman John McDermott that they were in negotiations with Fine Gael and it later transpired that these negotiations were about the collapse of the alliance in Roscommon County Council. Following on from that I was approached by John McDermott and the Hospital Action Committee to basically pull out

of the agreement with Fianna Fáil and support Fine Gael and if I did that, Fine Gael would allow me to be Chairman on Monday, but I'm a man of my word when it comes to agreements. Denis Naughten failed in his heave in Dáil Éireann and he's trying to get back some credibility for failing at national level, by orchestrating this at local level.

"Basically this isn't about the hospital, nor is it about turf cutting, if it is about turf cutting, why is my party leader the only one committed to supporting the turf cutters once he gets into power?"

"This is political opportunism by Ming in advance of a general election where he will be running and wishes to have a higher profile by using the mayoral position."

"Denis Naughten was on the radio recently being interviewed about the popularity of the Labour Party in a recent poll and his exact words were 'it looks like it could be Labour, Sinn Féin and a mish mash of Independents that will make up the next Government' and what has he now orchestrated, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin and a mish mash of Independents to run the council at a time when his party leader said he wouldn't do business with Sinn Féin.

"This is all about the popularity and the ground that the Labour Party is gaining and the credibility that it now has and nobody wants to see John Kelly in the chair because of the popularity and credibility of the Labour Party.

"Because I am a man of my word, I could have decided to go with them and Fine Gael would have assured me of the chairmanship, but I wouldn't do it for my own financial betterment, but I will do it if Fianna Fáil renege on commitments that they have given us.

"Luke signed an agreement in 2004 that he didn't honour. He signed an agreement last year that he didn't honour. How secure will his vote be with Fine Gael, can they trust that he will be honourable this time when he wasn't in the past? Outside of that, if he's the Chairman from Monday, I wish him the best of luck. It's a great honour and I hope he carries it well.

"I am particularly surprised at Cllr. Michael Mulligan, who I had a very good working relationship with in Ballaghaderreen since 2004 and on two occasions got elected on my number 2s. He mustn't be running for election next time. Mé féin and Sinn Féin have won the day."

## How the deal was done

■ Pauline Scott

Frantic negotiations between the Hospital Action Committee, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin and the Independent councillors on Roscommon County Council came to a close on Wednesday morning when a deal was signed which will see the power nexus in the council chamber change from a Fianna Fáil-led coalition to a Fine Gael-led coalition.

The coup was instituted by the Hospital Action Committee, after Cllr. Valerie Byrne, speaking at a recent public meeting, called on Independent members of Roscommon County Council to withdraw from a coalition led by Fianna Fáil if assurances on the future of Roscommon County Hospital were not forthcoming.

The new deal sees Fine Gael's ten councillors joined by two HAC councillors, one Sinn Féin councillor, Cllr. Michael Mulligan and Independent councillor Luke 'Ming' Flanagan to form a power-wielding group of 14 on the 26-member council.

Asked how the deal was done, Cllr. Valerie Byrne said, "it started the night of the public meeting with a call for the Independent councillors to pull out of the deal they were in, in support of the hospital."

"We met all groups individually. Every Independent was approached individually and then the Independents had to meet as a group of four, so we had to wait for the individuals and the group to make a decision. Before we went to the Independents, we talked to Fine Gael about a deal for the sake of the hospital, it is has progressed from there.

HAC Chairman John McDermott said, "We went to Fianna Fáil looking for an undertaking on the hospital, that services would not be withdrawn and we were unable to get that. Minister Harney stated yesterday that the services were going to be withdrawn to UCHG."

Cllr. Luke 'Ming' Flanagan explained that he faxed a letter to a Fianna Fáil meeting in the Abbey Hotel on Sunday last informing them that he could no longer support the council coalition unless he received a cast iron guarantee on the future of Roscommon County Hospital and that the Government would stop sending threatening letters to old people trying to keep their houses warm. "Two days ago I spoke to Fianna Fáil and they couldn't give me any guarantees. At the end of the day the most important thing is the people of Roscommon."

Concluding, Cllr. Paula McNamara said, "Roscommon County Hospital is the most important issue in this county. I am delighted that everyone has come on board to fight for the hospital and thank every individual for doing that."