

Written by Tom Kelly
Tuesday, 17 January 2012 14:41



MEMBERS of Sinn Féin in Mayo had reasons to be upbeat at the January meeting of the party's Comhairle Ceanntair in Castlebar.

It follows the publication of an opinion poll analysis which revealed the organisation is on target to win a seat in the next general election in the county at the expense of Fine Gael.

A study of the 'behaviour and attitudes' poll commissioned by the Sunday Times showed the party had increased its popularity by 7.5 points in the constituency to an impressive 14 per cent.

In the event of such projected support holding up in the next general election, Sinn Féin will oust one of the four outgoing Mayo Fine Gael TDs

The current level of support for the other groupings is Fine Gael (56 per cent, a drop of nine), Fianna Fáil (19 per cent, a three-point increase), the Labour Party (three per cent, a fall of 1.8), Independents (seven per cent, a 10-point reduction) and the Green Party (one per cent, a jump of 0.7).

It is heartening news for Sinn Féin in light of a somewhat disappointing performance in last February's general election when the party's two candidates, Rose Conway-Walsh and Thérèse Ruane, failed to make as big an impact as they had hoped due to the remarkable scale of Fine

Written by Tom Kelly
Tuesday, 17 January 2012 14:41

Gael's landslide.

Councillor Conway-Walsh, a Belmullet-based member of Mayo County Council, secured 2,660 first preferences while Councillor Ruane, the former deputy Mayor of Castlebar Town Council, received 2,142.

While the party's two-candidate strategy succeeded in increasing its share of the vote by 1.5 per cent since the previous general election in 2007, some observers believed the omission of Charlestown Councillor Gerry Murray from the field was an error of judgement.

If the newly published figures can be taken as an accurate guide, then the most likely base from which the party could mount a successful general election bid is Castlebar.

Not only do the statistics show Fine Gael will lose a seat, but they also suggest Fianna Fáil will not win back the seat it lost in the county town last year in the aftermath of Beverley Flynn's retirement.

Consequently, Sinn Féin strategists will expect Councillor Ruane to capitalise on her growing popularity by winning a seat on Mayo County Council in 2014 and further position herself at the frontline of local politics.

The next local elections would, in fact, represent a watershed for Sinn Féin in many respects if it succeeded in establishing a three or four-vote lobby on the county council.

There is growing speculation of an alliance being formed between Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil to wrestle control away from Fine Gael for the first time in a decade.

A similar scenario is also inevitable at national level as a result of the end-of-year poll predicting that Sinn Féin is in strong contention to win an additional 23 seats in the next general election, an accomplishment that would give the party 37 in total.

Written by Tom Kelly

Tuesday, 17 January 2012 14:41

The table accompanying this article gives a constituency-by-constituency breakdown of where those seats will be won.

In the event of the projections holding up, the number of seats held by each party would be as follows.

Fine Gael (58, loss of 18), Fianna Fáil (34, gain of 14), Labour Party (13, loss of 24), Sinn Féin (37, gain of 23) and others (24, gain of five).

Explained expert observer Adrian Kavanagh of the website politicalreform.ie: “The analysis estimates seat numbers for Fine Gael and Labour at 71, while seat levels for a potential Sinn Féin-Fianna Fáil alliance would stand at 69.

“Seat levels for a potential Left Alliance government, incorporating Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, various left-of-centre independents and small parties (including the United Left Alliance) would come in around the 60 seat level.

“Ultimately on these seat estimates, the likelihood of a hung parliament involving a minority government supported by a significant array of independent and small party TDs would appear to be the only option, unless Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil agreed to end Civil War politics once and for all and enter into a coalition government arrangement.

“If we end up with a centre-right bloc involving the traditional ‘two main parties’ facing off against a not-insignificant bloc of left-leaning TDs and parties, then we can really talk about a political earthquake in Irish politics.

“One final conclusion is to note how fluid politics stands in the post-NAMA landscape – the strong trends evident in the polls of 2010 and early 2011 are now being reversed with the recovery of Fianna Fáil and the decline in support for Fine Gael and the Labour Party.”