



Democracy and Change

The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Local Government Archivists and Records Managers
in association with the
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

Democracy and Change

The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Local Government Archivists and Records Managers
in association with the
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government

Published by the Department of Planning, Housing and Local Government

© Local Government Archivists and Records Managers [September 2020]

Text and images provided by members of the Local Government Archivists and Records Managers

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Designed by: Yellowstone

Cover image: Crowds at rally in Westland Row, Dublin, following the release of prisoners 1917. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

ISBN: 978-0-95084-702-7

Table of Contents

Foreword	1	
Introduction	3	
The value of local archives	5	
Acknowledgements	6	
Background	8	
Local government reform	13	
Proportional Representation	18	
Introduction of Proportional Representation to Ireland	19	
January 1920 election – borough and urban councils	27	
May and June 1920 election – county and rural district councils	36	
Women and the 1920 local election	45	
1920-1925 Local government during an unstable period	49	
Some notable figures of the 1920 local elections	54	
Endnotes	58	
Recommended reading	59	
Web links to articles	59	
Newspapers	60	
Publications	60	
Appendix 1	Results of the county council elections in June 1920 as transcribed from the <i>Freeman's Journal</i> , 12 June 1920	61
Appendix 2	List of local authority archives services in Ireland	64



First meeting of Cork City Council following the 1920 local election. Cllr. Tomás MacCurtain elected as Lord Mayor.

Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

Foreword

It is my honour as Minister of State for Local Government and Planning to provide a foreword to this publication: Democracy and Change – the 1920 Local Elections in Ireland.

Local Government is a fundamental part of our society. Understanding the history and development of Local Government in this country, allows us to reflect on its significance in our lives now, but also on how it has shaped the communities of previous generations.

There is no doubt that Local Government has been an important driver of economic, social and community development at local level, as well as of public service delivery in our communities. It has represented all of Irish society for 100 years. It has enabled the voice of every member of society to be heard in the democratic process and local decision-making structures. The role and importance of Local Government may go unnoticed at times, but publications such as this outline how important it was 100 years ago and, as highlighted during the current COVID-19 pandemic, how important it is today.

We are fortunate that our local authority archives services have such a collection of historic documents that allows us to study and understand better the context of perhaps the most important local elections in the history of the state. Having the ability to read minutes of meetings, ballot papers and archival material that previous generations had access to, provides a real flavour of what life was like 100 years ago.

However, it is also notable that, despite the many differences in our lives today compared to 100 years ago, the fundamentals of democracy and the importance of local government are the same.



Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

We can see similarities between the two periods in time – how local authorities established committees to tackle and address public health issues and deliver on public services in times of crisis whilst depending on revenue from rates and local charges. The publication also highlights the ways in which women were encouraged to participate in local politics 100 years ago, work that Government is also very determined to advance today in cooperation with key partners that this Department funds and supports.

I extend my congratulations and warm appreciation to the Local Government Archivists and Records Managers and all involved in the production of this important publication marking the 1920 Local Elections. I hope that this booklet will serve to educate and enlighten readers on the significance of local government and democratic representation in our communities. I would encourage readers to go one step further and actively engage with your local authority to understand the vital work that it is doing for you and your community.

Peter Burke, T.D.,
Minister of State for
Local Government and Planning

Introduction

Local authority archives contain a wealth of original materials that document the workings of local government, including for the period 1919-23.

The local elections of 1920 (urban authorities in January and other authorities in May and June) were a key point in the history of local government in Ireland. They were the first in which Proportional Representation voting was used. Following the elections many local authorities declared their allegiance to Dáil Éireann, which had major repercussions for the system of local government in Ireland.

In the context of the Decade of Centenaries, it is important to mark these events; they show that the struggle for independence was not only a military struggle but also a political and community one. Local government support and its allegiance to the new Dáil Éireann was hugely important to the cause of Irish freedom in this period. The election of so many candidates who sought independence demonstrates the support of the people for a new form of independence and Irish government.

Local authorities would be penalised for their support of Dáil Éireann and struggled with the loss of grants and financial support from the British Local Government Board, based in Dublin Castle. Many councils attempted to collect rates while resisting raids from the Royal Irish Constabulary and British Army. Infrastructure was damaged and funds were hard to come by but local authorities managed to survive and provide services to their communities.

The introduction of Proportional Representation was also a key change and it was to become the bedrock of our political system. The municipal election in Sligo Corporation, where it was first used, can be seen as one of the most important local elections in Irish history and was for the first time truly representative and democratic.



Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

There is much to learn from our history and much of which we should be proud. Local authorities provide local archives services, museums and library services to enable people to learn from their history and to take pride in their place in Irish history. Local authorities continue to work to support local communities and to provide infrastructure through, sometimes, challenging economic times, and we are proud to continue this tradition of service to our communities.

Michael Walsh, Chairman
City and County Management Association (CCMA)

The value of local archives

What we now know as the Decade of Centenaries, including the period covered in this booklet, 1919-1923 was a momentous time in modern Irish history, spanning a decade of rebellion, revolution, partition and war in Ireland as well as the foundation of the State. It is a period of time that has been well documented in national and British archival institutions, and many of their archival collections have been well exploited for research purposes over several decades. Much research has also been carried out in local archives services in Ireland in recent years. In an effort to increase public understanding of this complex period in Irish history, local archivists have catalogued collections relating to the War of Independence and Civil War periods pertinent to their counties. Research has been further enhanced by local online exhibitions and talks on some of the key events of the period including the centenary of the first Dáil in 1919, through oral history programmes and by the digitisation of local government archival material.



Much of what happened during the revolutionary years took place at a local level. Local Government Archivists and Records Managers maintain and preserve the archives of local authorities. They promote local and academic research, including research into this crucial period in our recent history. The local elections of 1918 and 1920 were among the defining events in this period, and the content of local archives reflect their importance. Many of the activities of the men and women who played nationally significant roles in the War of Independence are preserved and documented in local archives. Archives include local authorities' minutes of meetings, correspondence, photographs and promotional material and papers privately donated by individuals or organisations connected to the period in a county, city or town. Most local archives' collections of this period are accessible for research; some are now also online and thus accessible globally. Local archives of the 'Decade of Centenaries' can fill in some of the gaps in the history of this hugely significant time in Ireland's recent history.

Dr Niamh Brennan, Chair,
Local Government Archivists and Records Managers (LGARM)

Acknowledgements

Local Government Archivists and Records Managers wish to thank the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for funding this booklet. In particular, we wish to thank the Local Government Division of the Department, for all their assistance and support.

Thanks are also extended to Michèle Cashman, Local Studies, Sligo Central Library; Mike Murphy, Department of Geography, UCC; Dr John Crowley, Department of Geography, UCC; Dr Mark Humphrys; Liam Kenny, AILG; the Bulfin family and the National Library of Ireland.



Rally in Grand Parade Cork, 1917 - 1920
Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

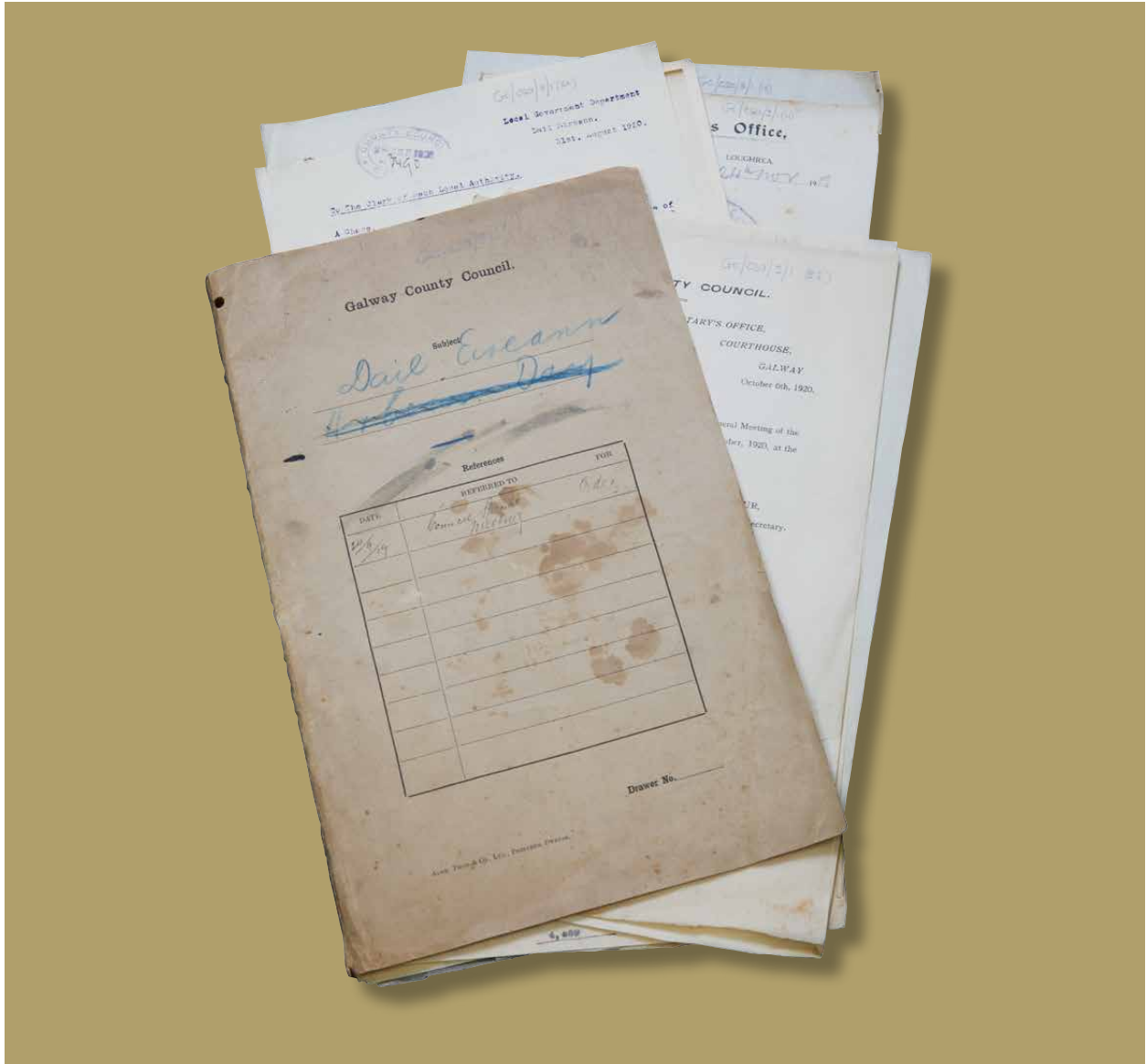
Background

The political landscape of Ireland had significantly changed in the space of less than a decade by the time of the local elections in 1920.

One major change in this period was the extension of voting rights to include women. The Representation of the People Act 1918 gave many people in Ireland the right to vote for the first time, including women over 30 years of age, and was seen as a major advance towards real democracy. The expanded electorate was a game-changer, but the biggest change in the period coming up to the 1920 local elections was the massive increase in support for national independence.

Home Rule for Ireland had seemed inevitable, but it was repeatedly blocked. In 1913, in response to the likelihood of Home Rule, Northern Unionists established the Ulster Volunteers, a heavily armed paramilitary organisation of over 100,000 men and supported by British conservatives. The same year, the Irish Volunteers was established in Dublin 'to secure and maintain the rights and liberties common to the whole people of Ireland', backed by all nationalist groups, including the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Sinn Féin, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Gaelic League, and the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP).

With the outbreak of the First World War, the Volunteers split between the republicans and Home Rulers following the call by IPP leader John Redmond MP for volunteers to enlist in the British forces. The war froze any possibility of Home Rule, and by 1916 the likelihood of mass conscription was looming over Ireland. Seizing a political and military opportunity, the Irish Volunteers rose in Dublin in Easter 1916. The ferocious response to the Easter Rising by the British military, the threat of conscription, and the successful republican campaign of political and cultural mobilisation, helped to bring about a change in nationalist public opinion in favour of establishing an independent republic. This sea-change was first illustrated at the ballot box in 1917, with republican electoral success in a number of by-elections, including Éamon de Valera in East Clare.

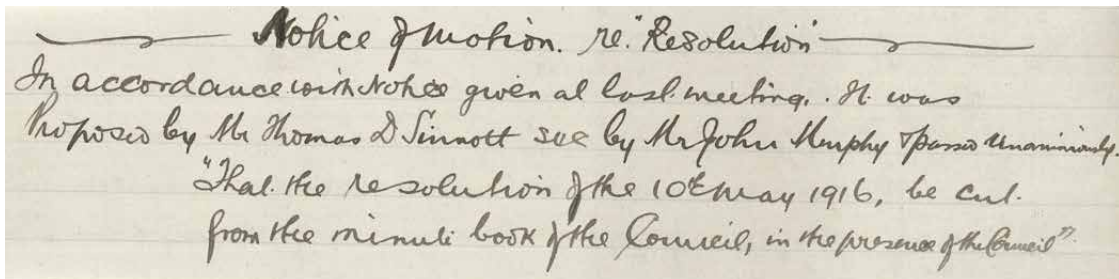


Folder of correspondence from Dáil Éireann, 1919-20

Image courtesy of Galway County Council Archives

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

With the co-operation of the Labour Party, Sinn Féin gained 73 out of 105 seats in the general election of December 1918, thus effectively wiping out the constitutional IPP, the Home Rulers. Newly elected Sinn Féin republicans would not take their seats at Westminster and established the first Dáil Éireann in January 1919, declaring national independence. At the same time, the War of Independence/Anglo-Irish War began with an ambush on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary. The War of Independence initially involved mainly the capture of arms and freeing of prisoners. However it grew in intensity from September 1919 with the RIC, Army, and British authorities boycotted, isolated and under attack. Dáil Éireann established a functioning government and courts, effectively replacing the British-run Dublin Castle administration. During January to July 1920, the period of the local elections, temporary recruits were enlisted from Britain, comprising the 'Black and Tans' and Auxiliaries, and a fierce guerrilla conflict ensued of ambush, arbitrary reprisal and counter-reprisal against both activists and civilians right across the country. Many RIC barracks, especially in rural areas, that had been abandoned, were burned down or destroyed by the IRA. The domination of local government by republicans, Dáil Éireann and the IRA seemed inevitable.



Notice of Motion. re. "Resolution"

In accordance with notes given at last meeting. It was proposed by Mr Thomas D Sinnott sec by Mr John Murphy & passed unanimously.

"That the resolution of the 10th May 1916, be cut from the minute book of the Council, in the presence of the Council"

Motion carried by members of Enniscorthy Urban District Council to cut the resolution of 13 May 1916 (condemning the 1916 Rising) from the minute book 'in the presence of the Council' (4 February 1920) Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

General Election Results - All Ireland

1910	Irish Parliamentary Party	73
	Independent Nationalist	2
	All-for-Ireland	8
	Liberal	1
	Liberal Unionist	1
	Irish Unionist Alliance	18

1918	Sinn Féin	73
	Irish Parliamentary Party	6
	Labour Unionist	3
	Independent Unionist	1
	Irish Unionist	22

U271/H/2

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE ACT, 1918.

**PARLIAMENTARY BOROUGH OF THE COUNTY OF
THE CITY OF CORK.**

Local Government Electoral Area of No. 5 Urban Electoral Division

Registration Unit of No. 5 Urban Electoral Division.

Polling District of College "K."

REGISTER OF ELECTORS.

GUY & COMPANY LIMITED. CORK.

Cover of Register of Electors, 1920 for the parliamentary borough of the county of the city of Cork

Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

Local government reform

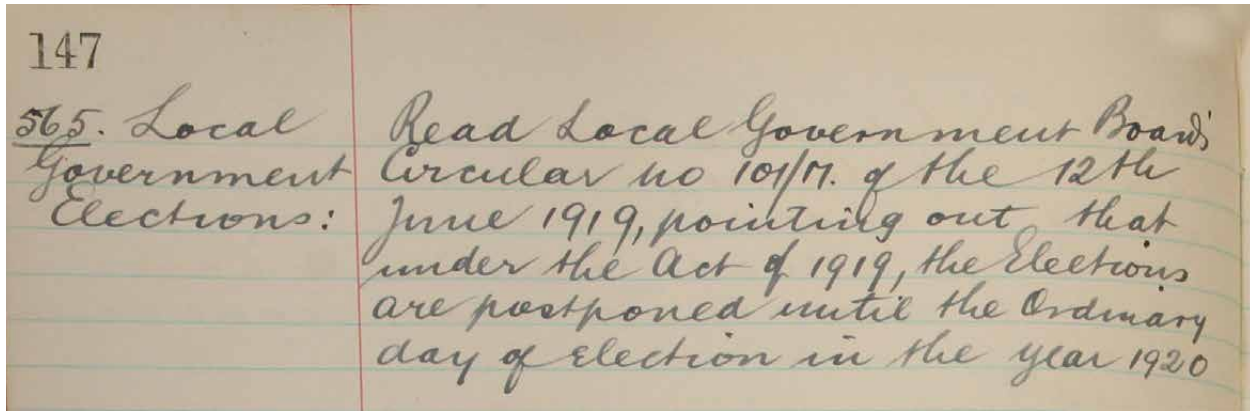
The passing into law of the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898 streamlined local government. It abolished the governing, though not the legal, functions of the grand juries and established county, urban and rural district councils.

As a result of the widened franchise there was a shift from a landlord-dominated system of governance to a much more representative one. Over 4,000 district elections took place in Ireland on 6 April 1899¹, which resulted in a landslide victory for the nationalist majority, and thus the ‘.....great revolution in Irish local government was accomplished remarkably swiftly and smoothly’².

The principal responsibilities of the councils were those transferred from the grand juries and the boards of guardians. The presentment sessions were abolished and the grand jury ceased to have any responsibility with regard to public works while the two main functions of the boards of guardians – the poor rate and the duties of the rural sanitary authority – were assigned to the councils.

What was a Grand Jury

Grand Juries were in existence since Norman times. They were unelected and made up of landowners selected by the Sheriff of the County. They mainly functioned as local government authorities at the county level. The system was so-called as the grand jurors had to present their public works proposals and budgets (known as **presentments**) in court for official sanction by a judge. Services provided and paid for by Grand Jury Cess, a rate payable by occupiers, included making and repair of roads and bridges, construction of courthouses and levying for support of district hospitals, schools and prisons. Grand Juries, as an administrative body, were replaced by today’s county, urban and district councils under the 1898 Local Government (Ireland) Act.



Extract from Galway County Council minutes, 14 June 1919, GC/1/3, p147
(re postponement of elections until 1920)

Image courtesy of Galway County Council Archives

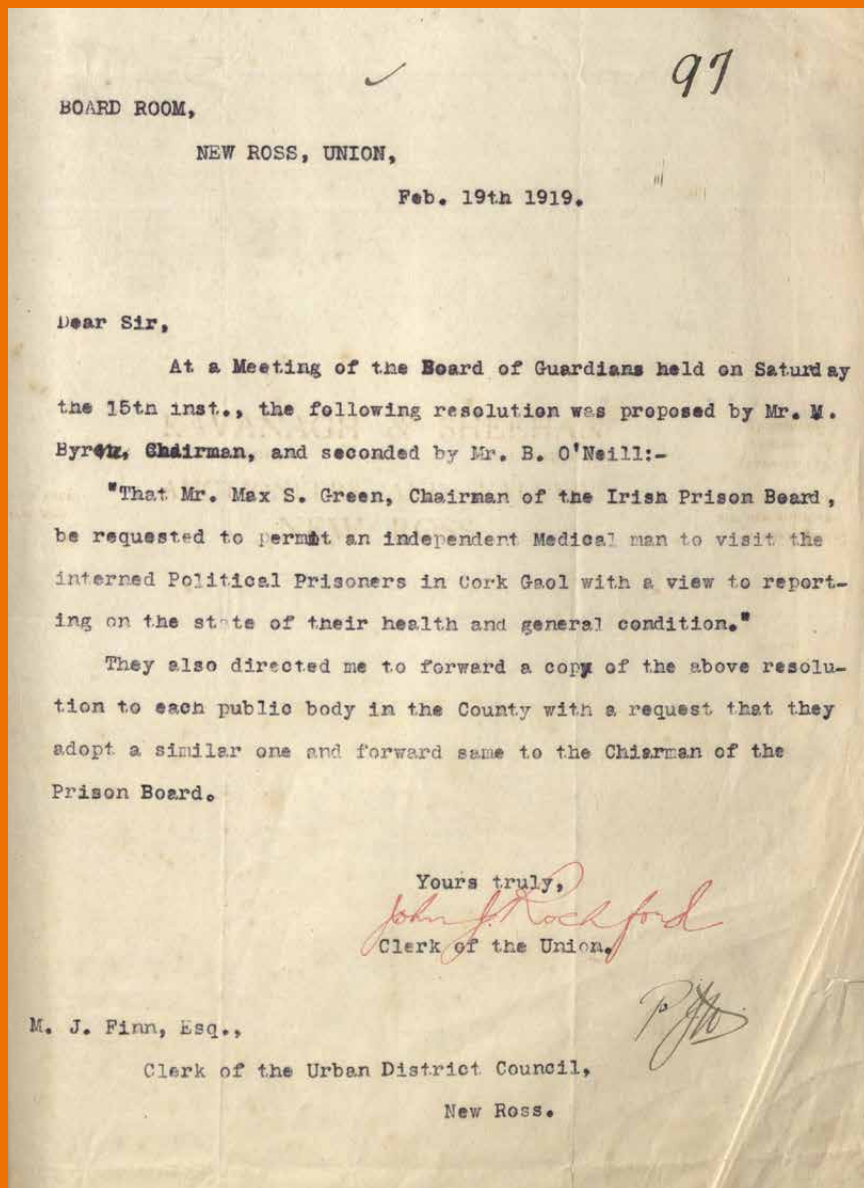
The main powers of the county councils included the construction and repair of roads and bridges; construction and maintenance of courthouses; support of mental asylums, county infirmaries and fever hospitals; appointment of coroners; levying and collecting of the poor rate; and duties under the Diseases of Animals Act, 1894.

The district councils took over the business of the baronial presentment sessions and that of the grand juries in relation to roads and public works, the cost of which was borne by the district. The boards of guardians continued to be responsible for poor relief and for the operation of the dispensary system and the registration of births, marriages and deaths. The election of guardians was integrated into the new local government system. The full membership of the rural district councils became members of the boards of guardians, while special elections associated with those for the urban district councils were held for guardians from the urban areas³.

Boards of Guardians

The Poor Law (Ireland) Act came into being in 1838. Under the Act, Ireland was divided into poor law unions each of which had a workhouse. An area **board of guardians** ran each union. Their responsibilities increased over time to include the areas of public health, boarding-out of children and rural housing and sanitation.

After the passing of the Local Government (Ireland) Act in 1898, many of the functions of the boards of guardians were transferred to the newly-formed county councils and a scaling down of the workhouses began. The boards, workhouses and the poor law system of relief were abolished in the early 1920s.



Resolution adopted by New Ross Board of Guardians requesting that the chairman of the Irish Prison Board permit an independent medical examination of interned prisoners in Cork Gaol, 19 February 1919
Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Initially, most councils were comprised primarily of members and supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which supported the bid for Home Rule. However, as Diarmaid Ferriter, historian and professor of Modern Irish History at University College Dublin pointed out, 'the profound conservatism of the membership and indeed aims of the new local authorities betrayed any idea of the introduction of local government heralding a revolutionary new mind-set in Ireland'⁴.

Nevertheless, the various local government institutions generally worked well without incessant interference from, or oversight by Westminster⁵, right up until 1920.

In the aftermath of the 1916 Rising, as the political situation in the country evolved and tensions escalated, so too did the attitudes of the various councils, with many, for instance, campaigning vigorously for prisoner rights and releases.

Local elections were to be held every three years, but the 1917 local elections were postponed due to the continuance of the First World War. Subsequent postponements resulted in a gap of six years before the next elections in 1920.

In the meantime, the General Election of 1918, 'carried out in a country under military repression'⁶ resulted in an overwhelming victory for Sinn Féin giving them 73 out of the 105 available seats. The Declaration of Independence made by Dáil Éireann on 21 January 1919 in the Round Room in the Mansion House, Dublin marked the first session of a National Parliament to meet on Irish soil for 300 years.

The first shots of the War of Independence were fired on the same day at Soloheadbeg, Co. Tipperary and District Republican Courts were introduced in April 1920 in almost every constituency in Ireland⁷. So, when the borough and urban district council elections were held in January, and those for the county and rural district councils in May and June 1920, all had changed, 'changed utterly' (in the words of WB Yeats), since the previous elections in 1914.

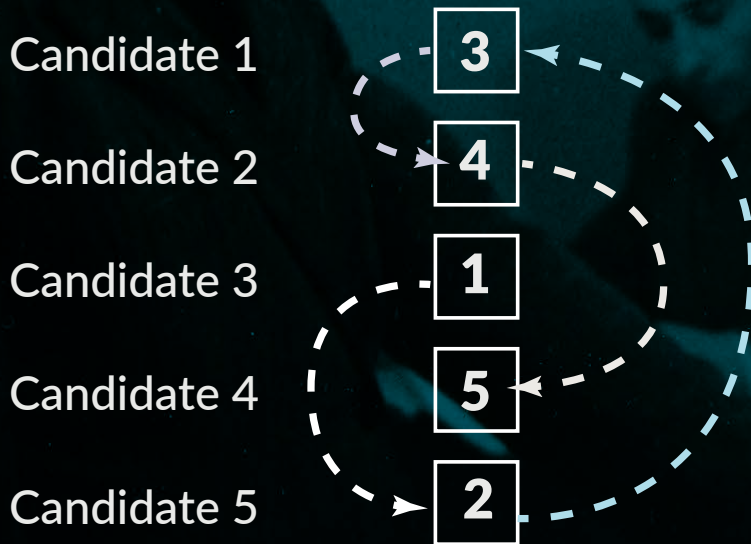
Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Registration Unit of No. 5 Urban Electoral Division.				Registration Unit of No. 5 Urban Electoral Division.			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
No.	Names in full. Surname first.	Residence or Property occupied and abode of non-resident occupier.	Nature of Qualification.	No.	Names in full. Surname first.	Residence or Property occupied and abode of non-resident occupier.	Nature of Qualification.
DIVISION III. Persons entitled to Vote as Local Government Electors only.				GREENMOUNT VILLAS.			
				3256	Prenderville, James	2	0
				3257	Dillon, Patrick	3	0
				3258	McCarthy, Denis	4	0
BANDON ROAD.				GREEN STREET.			
3229	Bradley, Frank	15 (82 North Main Street)	0	3259	Mulcahy, Margaret	11	0
3230	Lavallin, Ellen	78	0	3260	Browne, John	40	0
3231	Madden, Norah	109	0	GUNPOWDER LANE.			
3232	McSweeney, Elizabeth	128	0	3261	Mahony, Mary	7	0
3233	Murphy, Catherine	132	0	LOUGH ROAD.			
3234	O'Toole, Mary	151	0	3262	Cambell, Agnes	16	0
3235	Caniffe, Catherine	152	0	3263	O'Connor, Elizabeth	23	0
3236	Murphy, Margaret	159	0	3264	O'Connor, Eva	23	0
COLLEGE ROAD.				3265	O'Callaghan, Margaret	46	0
3237	Crowley, Sheila	40	0	3266	Carey, Catherine	56	0
3238	Keating, Mary	56	0	MALACHY'S LANE.			
CONVENT PLACE.				3267	Morley, Kate	19	0
3239	O'Riordan, Mary	3	0	NINETY-EIGHT STREET.			
3240	O'Riordan, Abina	3	0	3268	Looney, Mary	4	0
CROSSES GREEN QUAY.				3269	Coleman, Ellen	31	0
3241	Woods, Edward	1	0	3270	Foley, Mary	39	0
3242	Meagher, William	15 (3 Hardwick Street)	0	3271	O'Driscoll, Eliza	45	0
FULLER'S LANE.				PROTESTANT LANE.			
3243	McSweeney, Kate	30	0	3272	Armstrong, Julia	2	0
3244	Scannell, Bridget	41	0	ROCK VILLAS.			
GILLABBAY STREET.				3273	Shaw, Marguerite Emilie	3	0
3245	Crowley, Ellen	7	0	RUSSELL'S LANE.			
3246	Wagner, Caroline E.	22	0	3274	Ahern, Kate	2	0
3247	Fleming, Nora	31	0	3275	Ahern, Nora	2	0
GILLABBAY TERRACE.				SHARMAN CRAWFORD STREET.			
3248	Blennerhassett, Richard	6	0	3276	Maguire, Sadie	3	0
GOULD STREET.				3277	Beford, Winnie	3	0
3249	O'Sullivan, Nora	46	0	3278	Clifford, Kathleen	4	0
3250	O'Neill, Kate	51	0	3279	Donovan, Annie	5	0
GREENMOUNT AVENUE.				3280	Holland, Rita	7	0
3251	Ryan, Marion	1a	0	3281	McKechnie, John	21 (Sunday's Well)	0
3252	Creedon, Margaret	1a	0	ST. FINNBARR'S ROAD.			
3253	McCarthy, Ellen	8	0	3282	Sheehan, Hannah	14	0
3254	Cartin, Mary	12	0	3283	Cronin, Julia	23	0
3255	Reddin, Ellen	21	0	3284	McCarthy, Cornelius	36	0
				3285	McCarthy, Alexander	36	0

Extract from a Register of Electors, 1920 for the parliamentary borough of the county of the city of Cork
Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

Proportional Representation

The Single
Transferable Vote



Introduction of Proportional Representation to Ireland

The Proportional Representation Society of Ireland was founded in 1911. The society endorsed the system of the single transferable vote for multi-member electoral areas. Its aims were supported by nationalists such as Sinn Féin leader Arthur Griffith. He believed that its introduction into Irish elections would ensure fair representation of both nationalists and unionists under a Home Rule government. Many southern unionists also backed Proportional Representation. The system was included in the Home Rule Act of 1914, which was ultimately never implemented.

The Proportional Representation system was first used in the General Election of 1918 in just one constituency, the University of Dublin. The stunning electoral success of Sinn Féin in this election caused the British government to reflect on Ireland's electoral system. It was noted that there was a discrepancy between Sinn Féin's overall share of the vote and the proportion of seats the party won, due to the 'first past the post' system. The government sought ways to prevent a repetition of this domination by the party and encouraged the adoption of Proportional Representation in subsequent elections.

Locally the system was first tried out in an election in Sligo Corporation in 1919. The Corporation's financial position was extremely poor, and there had been a growing recognition among prominent unionist and nationalist businessmen of the need for local government reform. They sought to improve the condition of the town, to widen representation on the Corporation and to extend powers to levy rates. Protestants in particular felt deprived of their position of power by the 'first past the post' system of elections which meant that, even with over 15% of the population, their community held no seats on the Corporation. In late 1917, the Sligo Ratepayers' Association (SRA), made up of both Protestant and Catholic ratepayers, was formed. They quickly gained the support of prominent nationalists and town councillors, and demands for electoral reform grew within the town.

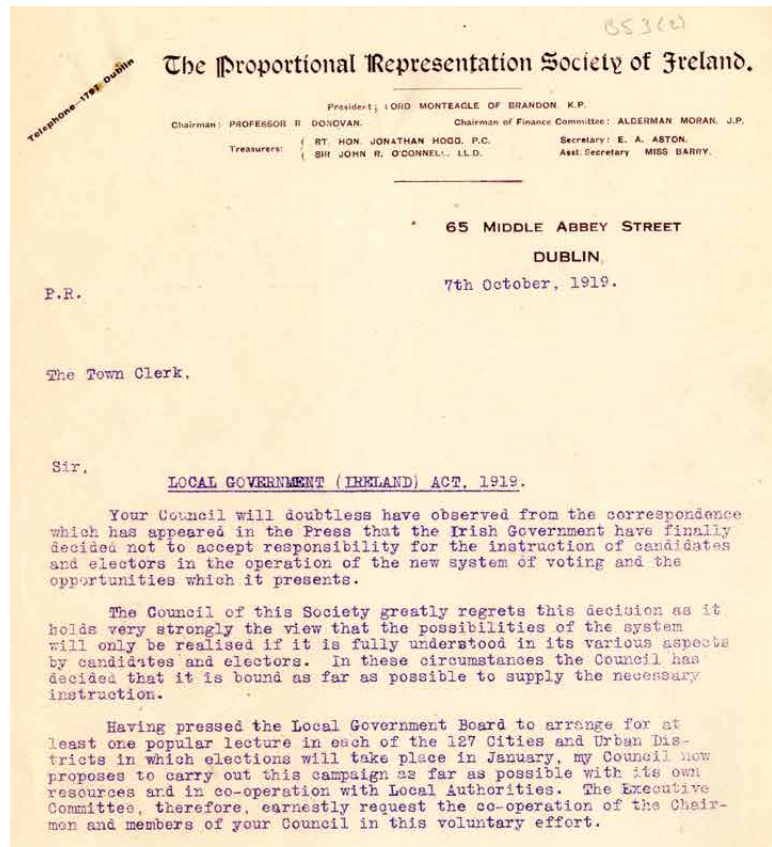
Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland



Thomas Scanlan MP

Image courtesy of
Sligo Central Library

Early in 1918, the North Sligo Nationalist MP, Thomas Scanlan, introduced a bill in the House of Commons which became the Sligo Corporation Act on 30 July 1918. The borough election took place in January 1919, and drew widespread interest, as it was the first local authority to use Proportional Representation in an election in Ireland or Britain. Turnout was high, and the result was a balanced one in terms of parties and religious denomination. Sinn Féin and Labour (plus one nationalist independent candidate) took 13 seats on the new Corporation, while the SRA and other independents gained 11 seats altogether.



Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

853(3)

2.

When the Sligo election was held, the Mayor convened a Town's Meeting, invited all the citizens to attend, and himself presided. A large gathering took place in the Town Hall, a lecture was delivered and followed by illustrative demonstrations and questions. That meeting and other popular means of education contributed greatly to the smooth working and general success of the Sligo Election.

My Council therefore suggest that the Lord Mayor, Mayor or Chairman of each Local Authority should consider taking immediate action upon similar lines. This Society will, as far as possible, meet demands for lecturers, and will be prepared to furnish the necessary equipment to enable those present at all meetings, by means of ballot papers and otherwise, to take part in an experimental operation of the system.

The time now available for such an extensive effort is very limited and my Committee would accordingly greatly esteem an early reply as to such arrangements as they may be desired to co-operate in in your District.

In order to avoid confusion I may add that my Council are gratified to know that the Local Government Board have accepted full responsibility for the technical instruction of Returning Officers and their staffs. This instruction, nevertheless, will not cover the necessities of the case as they will affect possible candidates and electors. But it is believed that the Society's work may be of real assistance to officials as an auxiliary to the technical assistance to be provided at the Government's expense.

I am, Sir,
Yours faithfully,

Secretary.

This and previous page: Circular letter from The Proportional Representation Society of Ireland to each local authority, referring to training needed for electors and candidates in the upcoming local elections in Ireland, 7 October 1919
Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

How Sligo paved the way for Ireland's

SLIGO "P. R." MUNICIPAL ELECTION. January, 1919.

Table showing particulars of West Ward Results and details of transfers.

No. of Votes, 940. No. of Seats, 8. Quota — $\frac{940}{8} + 1 = 105.$

CANDIDATES	1st Count		2nd Count		3rd Count		4th Count		5th Count		6th Count		7th Count		8th Count		9th Count		10th Count		11th Count		12th Count		Candidate Declared in Case of Election
	Transfer of Perry's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	Transfer of Rank's surplus	Result	
CONNOLLY, JAMES	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
DEERY, WALTER JOSEPH	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
FRAN, JOHN	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
HANLON, PATRICK J.	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
HAMILTON, JAMES	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
HARVEY, WILLIAM	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
HUGHES, JOHN DANIEL	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
HUGHES, JOHN	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
KEEL, PETER CAMPBELL	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
LAMBERT, JOHN	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
LAUREY, JAMES CAMPBELL	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
LYONS, JAMES	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
TAYLOR, JAMES	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
THOMSON, JOHN	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
TIGHER, EDWARD JOHN	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	26	66	105
Professors Exhausted	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940	940

ON January 15, 1919, the people of Sligo went to the polls and created history by becoming the first Corporation in Ireland to vote under the proportional representation system, later to be adopted throughout the country. For many years, the P.R. Society had been conducting a vigorous campaign to get the system introduced but it continued to be regarded largely as an academic exercise — the hobby of a group of political theorists. Then came Sligo.

In one day, the theory of the few became the objective of electoral reformers everywhere and the P.R. Society was flooded with requests for information and literature. Immediately announcing a major campaign throughout the country to get P.R. adopted by every local authority, the Society's financial aid added: "Sligo asked for P.R. — and got it! The same local initiative will produce similar results elsewhere."

CRISIS

The reason why Sligo was selected for this far-reaching electoral experiment is rooted in a borough financial crisis which became so serious that the furniture of the Town Hall was put up for sale in 1917.

Sligo was constituted a Borough by Royal Charter in 1612, and was administered by a Grand Jury until 1898 when the Corporation took over after the Local Government Act. While restrictions on the Corporation's power to levy rates for municipal purposes remained, it became liable for a new and practically unlimited liability for a number of extra charges.

Many people, by then, had either stopped taking an active interest in the Corporation's affairs, or, in the case of ratepayers, failed to get enough representation to make their influence effective. Meanwhile, the Corporation's financial problems deteriorated to such an extent that no cleaning, lighting and other essential services were provided.

Demanding drastic reforms, a number of citizens, mostly business people, formed a Ratepayers' Association. At the same time, following the seizure of Town Hall furniture to help pay municipal debts, a Local Government Inquiry into the Corporation's financial affairs was held "at which such irregularities and limitations were disclosed that the necessity for legislative action became evident."

The Ratepayers' Association didn't want any new legislation which would increase the spending powers of representatives under whose control the crisis had developed. Deadlock ensued between the Corporation and the Association. Proposals and counter-proposals were made, only to be abandoned as unworkable. Then, proportional representation was suggested. The idea was accepted by both sides and an agreed Bill, approved by the Irish Local Government Board, was submitted to Parliament and passed into law in the Autumn of 1918. Detailed rules were framed by the Local Government Board under which the election was carried out in January, 1919.

HUGE DEBTS

During the 1968 P.R. Referendum campaign, the late Deputy Eugene Gilbride claimed that when the Corporation took over the town's affairs, they became liable for a massive debt, incurred by the Grand Jury for building the Town Hall and for other purposes. He dismissed suggestions that the Corporation had mismanaged its affairs or misappropriated funds and added:

"Faced with all these difficulties, the Council decided to strike a huge rate in an effort to get enough money to maintain essential services. Immediately they took this decision, a ratepayers association was formed — by the very people who had earlier incurred the debt and passed it on. They objected strenuously to the striking of a higher rate, and even went so far as to apply to the High Court for an injunction to stop the Corporation striking the higher rate."

But the fact remains that the subsequent sworn enquiry into the Corporation's affairs found several irregularities and examples of mismanagement which had nothing to do with the days of the Grand Jury.

Commenting on the rates collection system, the Inspector said in his official report: "This ill-adviced procedure combined

with neglect of proper administration has caused such financial embarrassment that... the financial affairs of the Corporation are at the present time in a condition of insolvency. The evidence given at the enquiry, not alone by the officials but by the members of the Corporation, disclosed a lack of prudent, business-like management such as has not before come prominently under notice in the case of any other local authority."

One of his more startling findings revealed that the wages sheets included a number of persons who, though listed as working for specified days each week, did not work at all — in fact they were pensioners.

The enquiry also discovered that one wages list contained at least five names recorded as working on specified days each week who either didn't work at all or were not proper workmen. One was a blind man who had stopped working two years previously. Another was in France and a third was simply described as being 'absent'.

In the end, after much public debate, a resolution agreeing to P.R. was passed at a public meeting in the Town Hall. Deputy Gilbride, in 1968, claimed that the decision was not accepted without much objection from prominent Corporation members and from many townspersons.

"In the end, the Corporation and the people accepted P.R. because there was no alternative open to them. The decision was understandable when one remembers that the Corporation at this time was bankrupt, the town was going without the normal services including street lighting and cleaning, an injunction was hanging over their heads in the High Court, the British Press was making a laughing stock of the Borough Council and the only way out of the extraordinary mess was a blunt refusal from the British Government to allow an increase in the rate unless P.R. was adopted."

In any event, preparations got under way for the new-style election. The Corporation got the assistance and advice of Mr. J.H. Humphreys from the Proportional Representation Society, London, who arrived in Sligo some days before the election.



The count in progress during Sligo's first parliamentary election under P.R. held in May 1921.

The report said the Corporation should take immediate steps to "exclude from the wages sheets all persons who do not perform or are incapable of rendering efficient services."

It concluded: "Unless the members of the Council rise to the occasion and devote their energies in future to the transaction of municipal business on proper business lines, the ratepayers of the Borough will suffer peculiarly to an extent considerably in excess of the rates hitherto, or now to be imposed on them."

MESS

No matter who was to blame, several things were clear at this stage — all normal services had ceased to exist in the town, the Corporation was in an appalling financial mess, and angry ratepayers were demanding P.R. because they claimed they couldn't get representation on the Corporation under the old system.

Sligo was divided into three wards — North, East and West — each returning eight members. In all, forty-eight candidates were nominated, sixteen in each ward competing Ratepayers, Sinn Féin, Labour and Independent.

Mr. J.R. McCarthy who acted as Returning Officer, reported afterwards that the voters had no difficulty in grasping what they had to do. Illiterate voters quite easily expressed their preferences despite the number of candidates in each ward. In some instances, up to twelve preferences were expressed.

The spoiled votes in one of the wards amounted to less than one per cent of the total polled, and the number of papers spoiled because voters didn't understand the new system was about half the total spoiled votes. In fact, the ward with the highest number of illiterates had the lowest number of spoiled votes — and the ward with the lowest percentage of illiterates had the highest number of spoiled votes.

No. 8.

P.R. now ensures to every substantial section or interest the power to obtain its full and just representation upon all County, Municipal, Rural and Urban Councils and Boards of Guardians in Ireland.

NOTE—This shows the form of Ballot Paper to be employed in all future Elections of Irish Local Authorities

P.R. would ensure the effective representation of all minorities in any Irish Assembly constituted to deal with National Affairs.

NOTE—Local Authorities and Voluntary Organizations can obtain supplies of this leaflet, and leaflet P.R.I. 8, at 2d/6 per 1,000, or 4d/ per 100, post free.

P.R. LEAFLET No. 8. OCTOBER, 1919.

Experimental P.R. Election

THE SINGLE TRANSFERABLE VOTE.

This illustrative election is held on a constituency which returns six members, and it is assumed that the following eleven candidates have been nominated.

Although there are six members to be elected, each elector has one vote only, if the candidate for whom the elector votes, either 2d has more votes than sufficient to elect him, or, if, being at the bottom of the poll, he is defeated, his elector's vote instead of being wasted will be transferred to the elector's next choice.

Ballot Paper.

MARK THESE PREFERENCES NUMBERED AS FOLLOWS	NAME OF CANDIDATE
1	CARSON, Rt. Hon. Sir E. K.C., M.P.
2	CRAIG, Col. Sir James, M.P.
3	DE VALERA, Eamon, T.D.
4	DEVLIN, Joseph, M.P.
5	DILLON, John.
6	FARREN, Thomas, Pres. Irish Train Congress.
7	FORAN, Thomas, Pres. Transport Workers Union.
8	GRIFFITH, Arthur, T.D.
9	HEALY, Timothy M., K.C.
10	PLUNKETT, Sir Horace, K.C.Y.O.
11	WOODS, Sir Robert, F.R.C.S.I., M.P.

INSTRUCTIONS TO VOTERS.

You, by placing the figure 1 opposite the name of the candidate you like best,
You are also asked to place—
The figure 2 opposite the name of your **second choice**,
The figure 3 opposite the name of your **third choice**, and so on, numbering as many candidates as you please in the order of your preference.

NOTE—This paper will be valid if only the figure 1 is marked, but voters are advised to number in the order of their preference the names of candidates in order that their vote may be elected.

The paper will be invalid if the figure 1 is placed opposite the name of a candidate who is not nominated.

NOTE

The duty of the elector is completed when he, or she, has marked the ballot paper.

A simple illustration of the counting of the vote is given within. This is the task of the Returning Officer.

This illustration assumes that 205 electors took part in an imaginary election and that they voted generally upon party lines. Names of well-known politicians are employed for obvious reasons, but the figures have no political significance. The Society has published another illustration with the same names and in which Mr. De Valera leads the poll.

In a real election voters will be free to express preferences, Party or non-Party, as they may desire. The Returning Officer will merely give effect, and can only give effect, to such wishes as are expressed by the voters on their ballot papers.

This leaflet is issued by the P.R. Society of Ireland in accordance with the Society's campaign to give information to candidates and electors in respect of the method of voting which will be used in local elections in February and June, 1920.

Pamphlets of membership and other P.R. literature can be obtained from the Society.

P.R. SOCIETY OF IRELAND,
65 MONAGH STREET, DUBLIN.

Please do not destroy this leaflet; use it to explain P.R. to others; or pass it on.

P.T.O.

No. 9.

EXPLANATION

1st Count.

Papers marked The Returning Officer puts the ballot papers according to the names marked for first preference. With the figure 1, and credits each candidate with one vote in respect of each ballot paper on which his name is marked.

2nd Count.

Transfer of Sir Edward Carson's surplus. Sir Edward Carson has received 30 votes more than he wants and the Returning Officer transfers them in such a way as to give justice to all candidates marked by Carson's supporters on being their next choice. All Carson's 19 papers are re-counted and according to the names marked with the figure 2, the resulting total is as follows—

Carson has second choice on 11 of Carson's papers 11 papers
Woods 19
Carson can spare 20 out of his 30 votes. The ten candidates were two out of seven first, or two-fifths of each vote. Each candidate is credited according to his fifth of the papers on which his name is marked with the figure 2.

Craig is entitled to 16, i.e., two-fifths of the 40 papers on which he is second choice.

Woods is entitled to 4, i.e., two-fifths of the 16 papers on which he is second choice.

Eleven and four votes are accordingly transferred to Craig and Woods respectively as their proper shares in Carson's surplus.

3rd Count.

Transfer of Sir James Craig's surplus. As a result of the transfer of Carson's surplus Sir James Craig attains the quota. He is second choice on 20 papers.

THE RESULT OF THE ELECTION

With an electorate of 100 men in which the quota was 205.

Name of Candidate	No. of Votes—205.		No. of Seats—6.						Quota—100 = 1-30.	
	1st Count	2nd Count	1st Count	2nd Count	3rd Count	4th Count	5th Count	6th Count	7th Count	Elected Candidates
CARSON	30	20	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	Carson (1)
CRAIG	22	16	28	8	30	30	30	30	31	Craig (2)
DE VALERA	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	De Valera (3)
DEVLIN	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	Devlin (4)
DILLON	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	24	Dillon (5)
FARREN	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	Farren (6)
FORAN	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	26	Foran (7)
GRIFFITH	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	Griffith (8)
HEALY	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	Healy (9)
PLUNKETT	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	Plunkett (10)
WOODS	16	4	20	4	24	24	24	24	24	Woods (11)
TOTAL	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	205	

4th Count.

After all surplus votes have been transferred the Returning Officer declares defeated the candidate who is at the bottom of the poll, i.e. Sir James Craig. The votes marked by him are re-counted. His 7 papers are accordingly transferred to those voters on whom he is second choice, i.e. Sir James Craig attains the quota. He is second choice on 20 papers.

EXPLANATION

5th Count.

Transfer of Mr. Farren's surplus. Mr. Farren is now at the bottom of the poll. His 9 papers which are re-counted show next available choice as follows—6 for De Valera, 1 for Foran, and 1 for Dillon, and 1, and 1 vote are accordingly transferred to these candidates. The remaining vote is now transferred to Mr. De Valera's total is now 31 and Mr. De Valera has 31 votes. He is the third choice of Mr. Dillon. Mr. De Valera's small surplus of one vote is not transferred, because if it fell to him, the latter would still be at the bottom of the poll and would be declared defeated.

6th Count.

Transfer of Mr. De Valera's surplus. Mr. De Valera has 31 votes and the Returning Officer transfers them in such a way as to give justice to all candidates marked by De Valera's supporters on being their next choice. All De Valera's 22 papers are re-counted and according to the names marked with the figure 3, the resulting total is as follows—

De Valera has third choice on 11 of De Valera's papers 11 papers
Woods 19
De Valera can spare 10 out of his 31 votes. The ten candidates were two out of seven first, or two-fifths of each vote. Each candidate is credited according to his fifth of the papers on which his name is marked with the figure 3.

Craig is entitled to 16, i.e., two-fifths of the 40 papers on which he is second choice.

Woods is entitled to 4, i.e., two-fifths of the 16 papers on which he is second choice.

Eleven and four votes are accordingly transferred to Craig and Woods respectively as their proper shares in De Valera's surplus.

7th Count.

Transfer of Mr. De Valera's surplus. As a result of the transfer of De Valera's surplus Sir James Craig attains the quota. He is second choice on 20 papers.

P.R.—See Society's Leaflet P.R.I. No. 8, otherwise identical with this leaflet but showing alternative results with candidates elected as follows—(1) De Valera, (2) Griffith, (3) Caron, (4) Devlin, (5) Farren, (6) Plunkett.

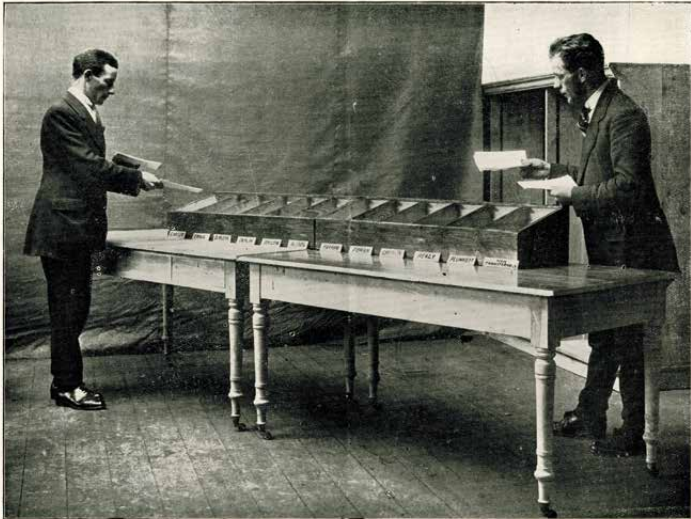
Leaflet outlining the Proportional Representation election process, October 1919 Image courtesy of Louth County Archives Service

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

The adoption of Proportional Representation for the Sligo election was lauded by politicians of all persuasions and by the local and national press (it was described by the Sligo Champion on 18 January as 'an historic event'). The overwhelmingly positive reaction thus paved the way for the British government to extend the system to all local authorities in Ireland in time for countrywide local elections in 1920. This extension was legalised under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919. The elections took place in 1920 in the midst of the War of Independence. Proportional Representation was later enshrined in the Constitution of the Irish Free State.

KENNY'S P.R. FRAMES FOR RETURNING OFFICERS' TABLES

MADE OF SELECTED TIMBER, HIGHLY FINISHED AND VARNISHED,
AND FITTED WITH WIRE-HOLDERS FOR REMOVABLE CARDS.



One compartment should be provided for each Candidate whose votes are to be concurrently analysed. 12 compartments are shown in illustration.

Useful for office equipment when not required for election purposes. Each compartment 8 inches deep and 7½ inches wide. 10 inches from front to back.

For each Section of Six Compartments £2 : 5 : 0
Carriage and Packing Extra.

Advertisement for Returning Officers' tables for Proportional Representation elections, 1920

Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

Council Chamber

30 January 1920

First Meeting of the Newly Elected
Aldermen & Councillors Elected
under Local Government (Ireland) Act
1919 on the System of **Proportional
Representation**

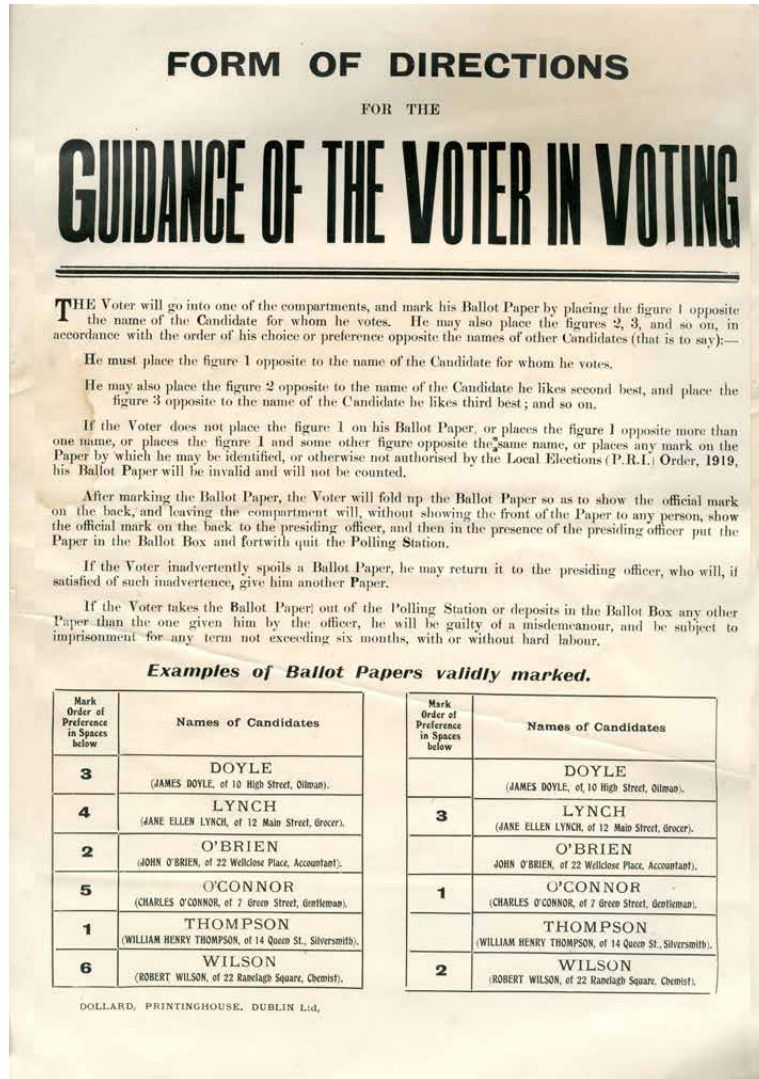
Present:

Alderman Maurice Quinlan in the Chair

Alderman Dempsey	Councillor Morris
Connellip	Padayachee
White D ^r	Hobbs
Cullen	Larkin
Quinlan P.	Walsh (John)
Keane	Jones
Brett	Cahill
Lawson	Cutler
Brazill	Heane (R)
Councillor Cummings (W ^r)	Tuchman
Dunne	Whittle
Povey	Conry
Walsh (John)	Moyle (John)
Murray	Moyle (John)

Extract from the minutes of the first meeting of Waterford City Council held after the first Proportional Representation election, 30 January 1920

Image courtesy of Waterford City and County Archive



Printed notice regarding form of directions for the guidance of the voter in voting, 1920
Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

January 1920 election – borough and urban councils

With the War of Independence escalating, great importance was attached to the 1920 local elections. It was seen as an opportunity to further challenge British political control in a period of hostilities and growing political crisis. By the time of the local elections on 15 January 1920, the fighting that had begun a year earlier had seen 14 Irish police killed and over 20 wounded⁸.

The borough and urban 1920 elections were the first held under the new system of Proportional Representation in a bid by the British government to prevent the level of victory that Sinn Féin had in the 1918 general election. As the first local elections held in six years, there were many first-time voters amongst the electorate and many new candidates running for the first time. Candidates were divided between the traditional nationalists or Home Rule party and the more modern nationalists who ranged from republican nationalists, Sinn Féin, Labour, Volunteer groups and those unwilling to accept the form of Home Rule on offer.

Polling took place in a range of public buildings across each county including national schools, libraries, town halls, courthouses and workhouses. In relation to the urban elections in Galway, the Connacht Tribune in an article dated 24 January 1920 refers to the ballot papers being taken 'to the Judge's room in the Courthouse, the door of the room being locked and sealed. It was guarded by two policemen and two representatives of the Sinn Fein party, as well as by a representative of the Returning Officer, all night'.

The counting of votes took place usually in the courthouse and union offices. It was described as the 'dullest election...ever experienced' in Dublin by The Irish Independent (16 January 1920) and 'the most spiritless election' ever having been held in Galway by the Connacht Tribune (5 February 1920). However, it was not without its moments, such as when Frederick J. Allen, Dublin Corporation employee and chairman of the Sinn Féin election committee in Kingstown was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for having revolutionary literature in his possession⁹.

Municipal Elections, 1920.
RATEPAYERS' SELECTION.

Your Vote is solicited in favour of the Candidates whose Names appear in heavy type. These Candidates have been unanimously selected to represent the Ratepayers of the Borough of Wexford. Votes for them are Votes for Efficiency and Economy.

St. Mary's Ward. Form of Ballot Paper		St. Iberius Ward. Form of Ballot Paper.		St. Selskar Ward. Form of Ballot Paper.	
Mark Order of preference in Space.	Names of Candidates.	Mark Order of preference in Space.	Names of Candidates.	Mark Order of preference in Space.	Names of Candidates.
	BILLINGTON, JAMES		BYRNE, NICHOLAS (Outgoing)		BOTE, JOSEPH
	CLANCY, PATRICK		COWMAN, PHILIP (Outgoing)		BROWNE, JAMES (Outgoing)
	COFFEY, ROBERT A. (Outgoing)		HAYES, THOMAS		BROWNE, MICHAEL
	CORISH, RICHARD		KIRKE, JOHN		CARTY, FRANCIS
	CROSHIE, JAMES		KIRWAN, JOHN (Outgoing)		CONNOLLY, NICHOLAS
	CUMMINS, LAURENCE		LARKIN, JAMES		DEMPSEY, HENRY
	FENNEL, ALICE MARY		LYMBERY, MATTHEW (Outgoing)		DOYLE, JOSEPH (Outgoing)
	MARTIN, MICHAEL		McGUIRE, WM. H. (Outgoing)		GIBSON, RICHARD (Outgoing)
	MORRIS, PATRICK		O'CONNOR, MATTHEW		HADDEN, GEORGE (Outgoing)
	MURPHY, JAMES (Outgoing)		DANFORTH, THOMAS		MCMAHON, JAMES
	O'BRIEN, THOMAS		SINNOTT, JAMES (Outgoing)		O'CONNOR, MARY ANNE
	O'CONNOR, PATRICK		THOMPSON, HERBERT		O'CONNOR, MARTIN
	O'NEILL, DAVID		WALSH, THOMAS		SINNOTT, JOHN
	HADFORD, LAURENCE		WHITE, PATRICK		
	ROWE, CHARLES J.				
	SINNOTT, JAMES				
	WALSH, JOHN				

The method of Voting is very simple. Put 1 in square in front of Candidate you like best ; 2 before your second choice ; 3 before your third choice, and so on until you have Voted for the 6 Ratepayers' Candidates, after which vote for the other Candidates of your choice.
Do **not** put a **K.** It will spoil your paper.
NOTE—Should you by mistake Spoil your paper the Returning Officer will give you another one.

(w25013)

Mock-up of the ballot paper for candidates representing the Ratepayers in the municipal elections in Wexford, with the slogan that voting for the names marked in bold print would be 'votes for efficiency and economy'

The People, 14 January 1920

Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

While the outcome of the municipal elections proved Sinn Féin's dominance, the effect of the Proportional Representation system meant that minorities won new representations. Labour made remarkable gains and Sinn Féin took control of seats in what were previously considered unionist strongholds in Ulster, while unionists did the same in nationalist areas in the south. The local elections provided people with an opportunity to address local issues, and in Sligo Corporation, for example, the Ratepayers' Association topped the poll.



Photograph of Tomás MacCurtain, the first republican Lord Mayor for Cork, 1920
Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

Tomás MacCurtain
Chairman

Signature of Tomás MacCurtain at the end of the minutes of his first meeting as Chairman of Cork City Council, 30 January 1920
Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

WEXFORD TRADES AND LABOUR COUNCIL.
THE VOICE OF LABOUR.
 In support of the Labour Candidates at the forthcoming Municipal Elections
A GREAT LABOUR Demonstration
 WILL BE HELD
On Sunday Next, January 11th
AT ONE O'CLOCK.
 Trades Unions, with their Banners, will assemble on The Quay, between Common Quay Street and Anne Street.
 All Workers, Women and Men, should take part and show that they are determined that Government by the People in the interests of the People must prevail in Wexford.
 Mr. E. McAlpine, New York, and other well-known Speakers will deliver Addresses.
 Several Bands will Attend.
SHALL THE PEOPLE RULE?

Printed notice of a demonstration organised by Wexford Trades and Labour Council in support of the Labour candidates in the municipal elections in Wexford, 1920

Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

DUNDALK URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL.
DECLARATION ACCEPTING OFFICE.
 I, Peter Hughes having been chosen
Councillor for the South Ward of the Urban
 District of Dundalk, hereby declare that I take the said Office upon myself and will duly
 and faithfully fulfil the duties thereof according to the best of my judgment and ability.
 Made and Subscribed before me
 this 21st day of January 1920
 M. Conroy, Clerk of Council.
 Returning Officer.
Peter Hughes

Declaration of Peter Hughes on accepting office as councillor for the south ward of Dundalk UDC, 20 January 1920

Image courtesy of Louth County Archives Service

In other respects this Election was novel. It was the first contested Election since the passing of the Representation of the People Act of 1918, which made important changes in the franchise, and gave the right of voting to married women living with their husbands, a condition which therefore deprived them of the right to vote no matter how great their qualifications might be. By that Act the number of municipal voters was increased, to about 63%. The Act also provided a new qualification for membership of the Council, namely:—ownership of property situate in the Borough.

The following are some of the particulars of the Elections:—

There were six Members to be elected for each of the four Borough Areas

St. Mary's North

The following were validly nominated:—

Doham Francis, 66, Siochtouna, Clonmel. Coach Painter

Mackey Dominick 33, Gladstone Street, Upper Clonmel. Cycle Fitter

Mackey William 21, Mary Street Clonmel. Operative Baker

Power Joseph 50, Cashel Street, Clonmel. Tailor

White Joseph 3, Wolfe Tone Street, Clonmel. Tailor

Hilliment Walter William, 4, Wolfe Tone Street, Clonmel. Fitter

Besides the foregoing nomination papers were delivered for:—

Fayle William Thomas 23, Queen Street. Gentlemen

Laurry Denis 4, Upper Gladstone Street. Merchant

but these two latter nominations were invalid, and there being accordingly no contest the six validly nominated candidates were on the 16th instant, declared duly elected for the Corpn.

Extract from minutes of Clonmel Corporation, noting that the right of married women to vote had increased the number of voters by 63% and showing candidates elected for the borough area of St. Mary's North, Clonmel, 1920

Image courtesy of Tipperary County Archives

103

30th January, 1920.

A Statutable Meeting of the Council was held this day at the Town Hall at noon.

This was the first meeting held under the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1919, an Enactment which prescribed for the first time for Municipal Elections to be held under the Proportional Representation system of election.

The Elections for the new Council took place on the 15th Instant, when the following 24 persons were elected, namely.

As Aldermen:- James Sinnott, James Larkin, Richard Corish,
Patrick Clancy, George Hadden, Nicholas Connolly.

As Councillors:- Nicholas Byrne, Thomas Rossiter, Thomas Hayes,
Philip Cowman, Herbert Thompson, James Crosbie,
John Walsh, Michael Martin, Laurence Cummins,
Thomas O'Brien, James Billington, David O'Neill,
James Sinnott, Alice Mary Kennell, Francis Carty,
Joseph Boyse, Richard Gibson, Mary Anne O'Connor.

It so happened that all the above Members were in attendance.

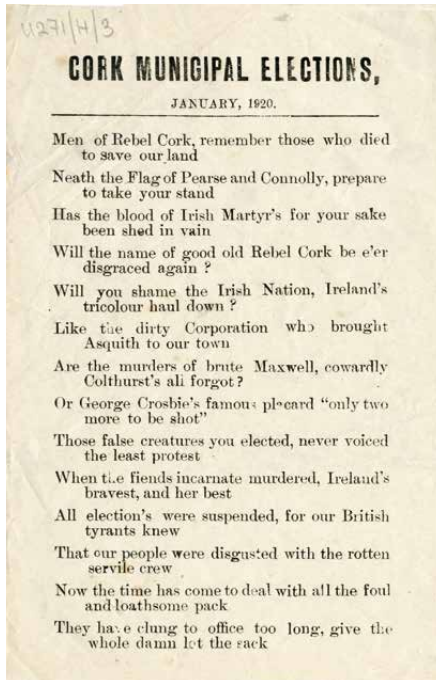
Extract from the minutes of Wexford Corporation, following the January election, on 30 January 1920, listing the newly elected council

Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

With a high turnout and some violent clashes occurring such as in Cork, the results saw Sinn Féin win 560 seats, Labour 394, Unionists 355, Home Rulers 238, Independents 161 and municipal reformers 108. Republicans took control in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, while Waterford and Derry had no single party in overall charge (10). A total of 10 out of 12 urban councils in Ulster including Strabane, Derry, Omagh and Armagh were now under joint nationalist/Sinn Féin control. Belfast was the only urban council where unionists gained control with 35 seats. It consisted of 60 members, five of whom were Sinn Féin, five nationalists and 13 Labour¹¹.

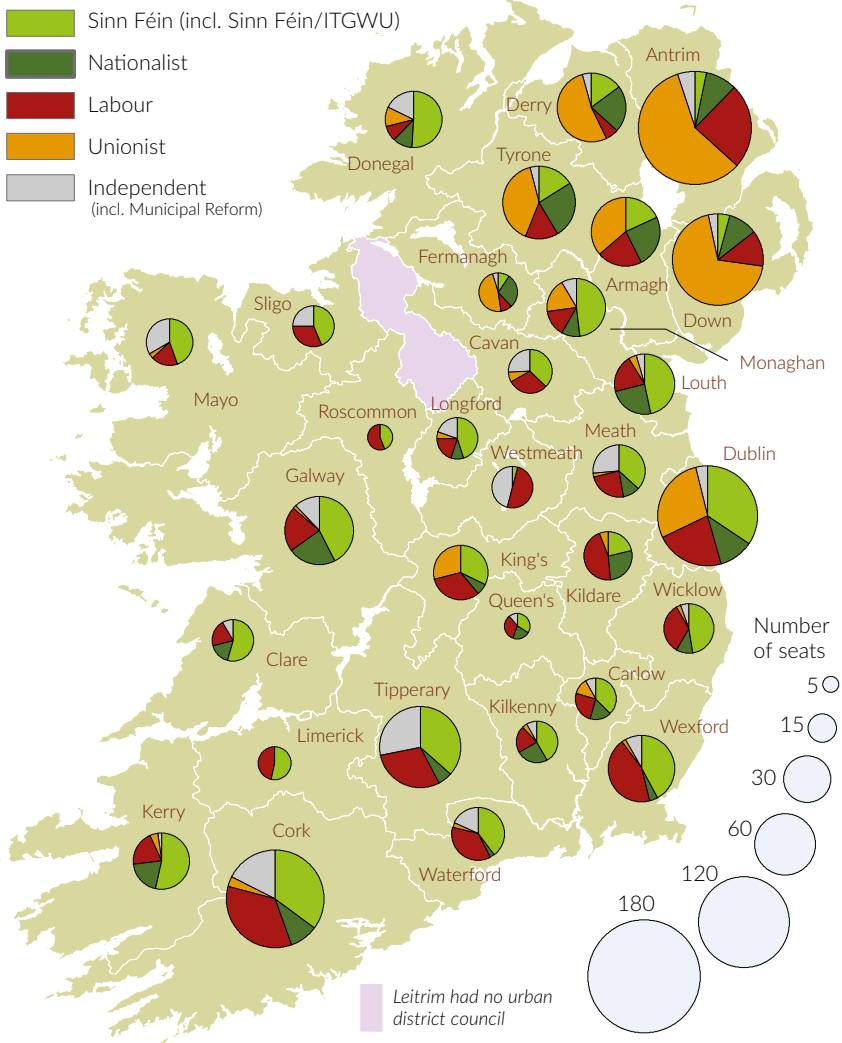
However, while Sinn Féin was victorious and progress was being made by the new Dáil Éireann, in reality, local councils were still very dependent on British assistance, therefore they remained in communication with the British Local Government Board. This was contrary to the instructions of the Dáil and despite many councils having passed a resolution soon after the elections acknowledging the authority of Dáil Éireann over that of the Local Government Board¹².



Election flyer from the Liam de Róiste (TD and Councillor) archive

Image courtesy of Cork City and County Archives

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland



Map showing the share of seats won by parties in each county in the January elections, 1920

Image courtesy of Atlas of the Irish Revolution (UCC)

COUNTY OF DONEGAL.

Election of County Councillors in the Year 1920.

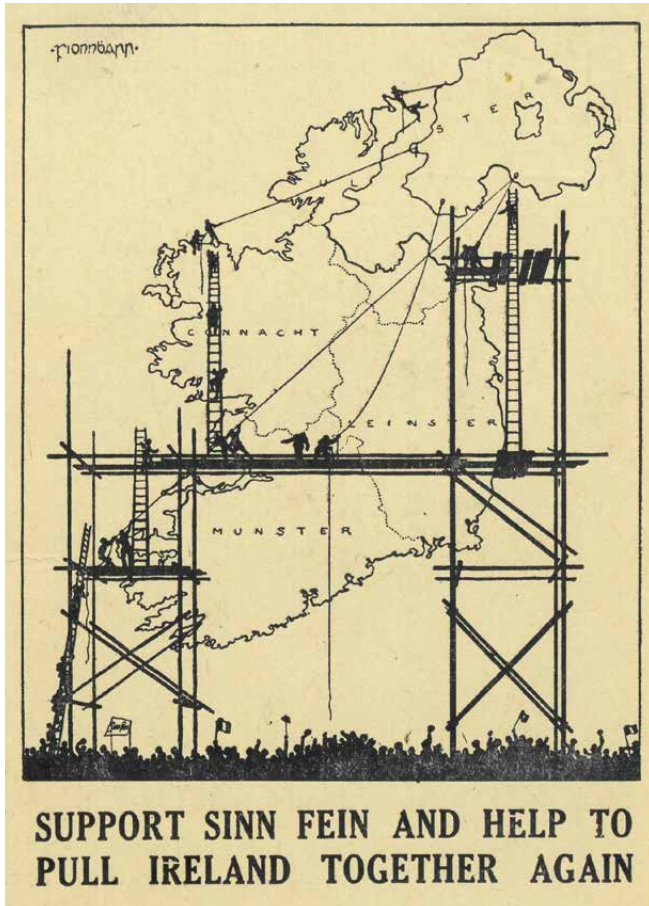
INSTRUCTIONS TO PRESIDING OFFICER.

- Posting Notices.* 1. You are to be at your Polling Station at about 7 a.m. If you find it insufficiently furnished you will endeavour to procure a table and as many chairs as may be required. Before the Poll opens you are to see that one Copy of Instructions to Voters is posted inside and one outside compartment for Voting—one copy on outside of door of station and two at outside entrance to station. See also that the Pencils supplied are placed in the compartment for voting. You are to open the Poll in your Polling Station at EIGHT o'clock in the forenoon and keep it continually open until the hour of EIGHT o'clock in the afternoon, when you are finally to close it.
- Hours of Poll.*
- Attendance.* 2. You are not to absent yourself from your Polling Station during any part of the time that the Poll remains open.
- Sealing Ballot Box.* 3. You shall, before the commencement of the Poll, show the Ballot Box, empty, to such persons, if any, as may legally be present in your Polling Station, so that they may see it is empty, and shall then lock it up, and put your seal upon it, so as to prevent its being opened without breaking such seal, and shall keep it in your view for the receipt of Ballot Papers, and keep it so locked and sealed.
- Persons admitted to be present.* 4. You are to regulate the number of Electors to be admitted at a time to your Station. The only persons you are to permit to be present in your Station are the Electors recording their Votes, your Clerk, **ONE AGENT** duly appointed for each Candidate, and the Constables on duty. You are not to allow any Candidate except for the purpose of recording his Vote or any other person whomsoever to be present in your Station. An Agent for a Candidate must, on being admitted to the Station, hand to you his Appointment and Declaration of Secrecy, duly made, and you are to retain these, and deliver them to the Returning Officer or the Deputy Returning Officer.
- Electors entitled to Vote.* 5. Every person whose name is on the Register of Electors supplied to you is entitled to receive a Ballot Paper and to Vote at the Polling Station allotted to him or her: Provided the Elector shall not have voted in another County Electoral Area of the County.
- How the Registers are to be marked.* 6. Should the Unit on the Register be comprised in different Polling Districts with different Electors having the same number you will put the distinguishing mark, such as A, B, or C, together with the number of Elector on the Register, on the Counterfoil of the Ballot Paper, such as 10A, 10B, or 10C, as the case may be.
- Procedure in giving out Ballot Papers, checking Register, and marking Counterfoils of Ballot Papers.* 7. When an Elector applies to you for a Ballot Paper, ask him or her his or her name and place of abode. When he or she replies, look to the Register and see if his or her name is on it, and then call out the number, name, and description of the Elector as they appear on the Register. You then enter on the Counterfoil of the Ballot Paper the number of the Elector on the Register (and if necessary the distinguishing mark, such as 10A, 10B, 10C, as the case may be, as directed by Instruction No. 6), separate the Ballot Paper from the Counterfoil and stamp it on both sides with the official mark, and put a check on the proper Register to denote that the Elector has received a Ballot Paper, then hand Ballot Paper to Elector.
- Marking of Ballot Paper by Elector* 8. The Elector, on receiving the Ballot Paper, is forthwith to proceed into one of the compartments in the Polling Station and there secretly record his or her Vote on the Paper, and fold it up so as to conceal his or her Vote, but so as to leave the official mark on the back visible; he or she is then (keeping the Ballot Paper still folded) to show you the official mark on the back of the Ballot Paper; and having done so, place the Ballot Paper, still folded, in the Ballot Box in your presence. He or she is to Vote without undue delay, and quit the Station as soon as he or she has put the Ballot Paper into the Ballot Box.
- Spoilt Ballot Papers.* 9. If an Elector has inadvertently dealt with his or her Ballot Paper in such a manner so that it cannot be conveniently used as a Ballot Paper—on proving to your satisfaction the inadvertence, and delivering it up to you—you may give him or her another Ballot Paper in its place. You will immediately cancel the spoiled Ballot Paper by writing on it the words "Spoilt, Cancelled," and put such spoiled Ballot Paper in Envelope No. 2, provided for unused and spoilt Ballot Papers.

Instructions to Presiding Officer in the election of county councillors in County Donegal in 1920

Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

May and June 1920 election – county and rural district councils

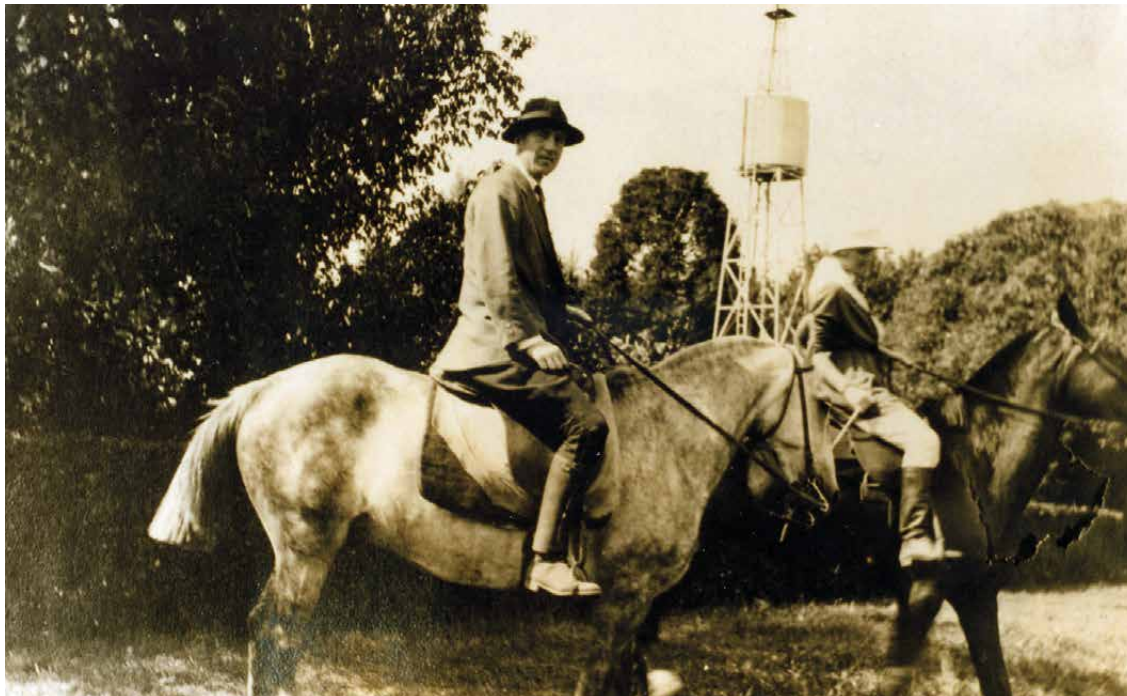


Rural District Council leaflet for Carlingford, Co. Louth in respect of Sinn Féin candidates, June 1920

Image courtesy of Louth County Archives Service

After its impressive performance in January, Sinn Féin expected to do well in the elections to county councils and rural district councils in the summer. The party promised to build more public housing and improve health and other local services, which were issues likely to win it support, apart from its separatist agenda.

Elections were held around the country on dates in late May and early June with local authorities having the option of fixing the polling day within this period. The introduction of Proportional Representation meant there was a need to educate people in how it worked. The Freeman's Journal reported on 9 June that the Proportional Representation Society, which had run a publicity campaign prior to the January elections, was restricted in its work in the later campaign because of lack of funds. Generally speaking, 'the electors had to depend upon National teachers and local organisers for instruction in the system', according to the Freeman.



Éamonn Bulfin on horse in Argentina. He was elected as chair of Offaly County Council in June 1920 in absentia having been deported in 1919 to Buenos Aires, his place of birth following internment in Frongoch for his role in the 1916 Rising. He was notable for raising the 'Irish Republic' flag over the GPO in the Rising

Image courtesy of the Bulfin Family

The War of Independence had gathered pace since January and the summer ballots took place in the context of greater militarisation. The Irish Republican Army was more prominent in electioneering throughout the country, including in the guarding of polling stations which drew the charge of intimidation from unionists.

Referring to the elections in Dublin, the Irish Times (8 June) noted that Sinn Féin was the only party to organise transport for its candidates and voters and 'from an early hour motor cars and other vehicles flying the tricolour brought in voters'.

HONORARY OFFICERS.

T. M. Russell proposed, Patrick Grogan seconded, and it was resolved :—“ That Mr. Eamonn Bulfin be appointed Chairman of the Council for the ensuing year.”

C. J. O’Riordan proposed, and T. M. Russell seconded, that Mr. John Kelly be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council for the ensuing Year, and that during the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman should discharge all the business appertaining to the office of Chairman of the Council.”

Mr. Kelly then took the Chair.

THE GOVERNMENT OF IRELAND.

The following Resolution was passed unanimously, on the motion of the Chairman, seconded by T. M. Russell :—

“ THAT THIS COUNCIL OF THE ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES OF OFFALY, AT A DULY CONVENED MEETING, HEREBY ACKNOWLEDGES THE AUTHORITY OF DAIL EIREANN AS THE DULY ELECTED GOVERNMENT OF THE IRISH PEOPLE, AND UNDERTAKES TO GIVE EFFECT TO ALL DECERES DULY PROMULGATED BY THE SAID DAIL EIREANN, IN SO FAR AS SAME EFFECTS THIS COUNCIL. THAT COPIES OF THIS RESOLUTION BE FORWARDED TO THE REPUBLICAN MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, FOR TRANSMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF EUROPE AND TO THE PRESIDENT AND CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.”

Extract from minutes of Offaly County Council held on 19 June 1920 regarding the appointment of Éamonn Bulfin as chairman in absentia. It also records that it acknowledges the authority of Dáil Éireann as the duly elected government of the Irish people.

Image courtesy of Offaly Archives

Sinn Féin’s victory was comprehensive. The party took control of 27 out of 33 county councils, and in Fermanagh and Tyrone, it combined with nationalists to form majorities. The Freeman’s Journal declared: ‘The defeat of Carsonism in Tyrone is one of the most important incidents of the elections.’ Of 206 rural district councils, Sinn Féin took 172 and therefore also controlled most boards of poor law guardians. Their success extended even to Ulster, with the party winning control of 36 of Ulster’s 55 rural districts. Many of the newly-elected councillors had no previous experience of local government, and some were serving Volunteers.

P. R. ELECTION.

TRANSFER of Kelly's SURPLUSTotal Surplus - - - - - 55Number of Transferable Papers - - - - - 248Proportion of papers to be transferred = $\frac{\text{Surplus}}{\text{Number of Transferable Papers}}$ = $\frac{55}{248}$

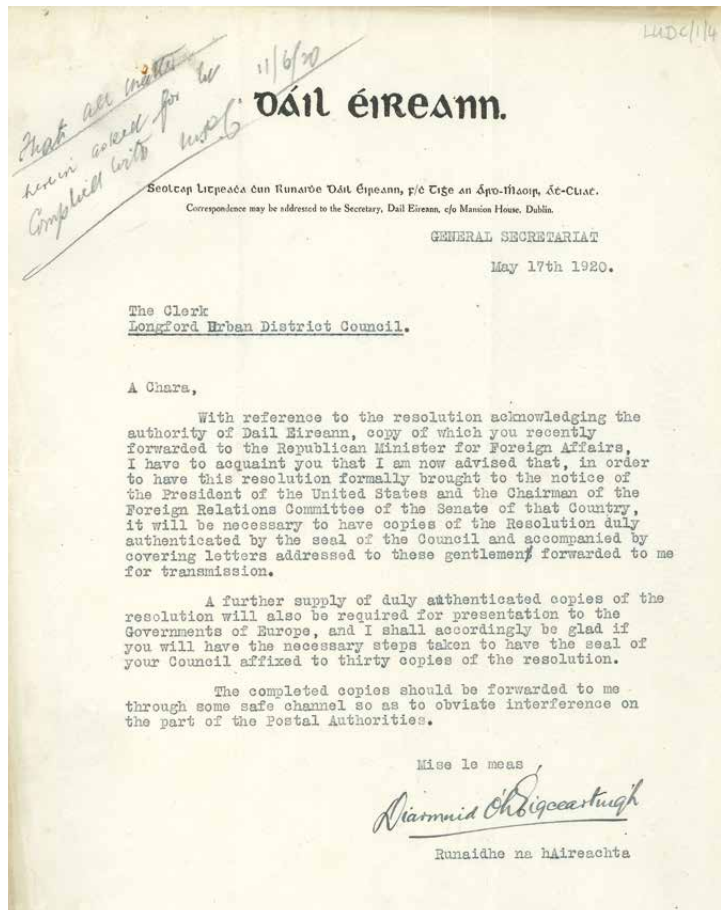
Names of Candidates marked as the next available preference	Number of Papers for each next available preference	Number of papers transferred			No. of Papers retained for <u>Kelly</u> 's Quota
		Calculated as above		Actual Number transferred (Largest fractions being treated as whole numbers)	
		Whole Numbers	Fractional parts (Numerators only need be shown)		
<u>Donaghe</u>	<u>190</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>148</u>
<u>Granaghan</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Loughlin</u>	<u>2</u>	1	<u>110</u>		<u>2</u>
<u>McGowan</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>McGrath</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>177</u>		
<u>McHulby</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>191</u> ⁰	<u>4</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Mulhern</u>	<u>3</u>		<u>165</u> ⁰	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>O'Brien</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>135</u> ⁰	<u>6</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Wilson</u>	<u>1</u>		<u>55</u>		<u>1</u>
Total number of transferable papers ...	<u>248</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>55</u>	<u>193</u>
Number of non-transferable papers ...	<u>18</u>				<u>18</u>
TOTALS	<u>266</u>				<u>211</u>

Calculator's Signature Denis FlanaganChecked by McGowan

Record of transfer of Edward Kelly's surplus votes in the Ballyshannon Rural District Council election, June 1920
Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

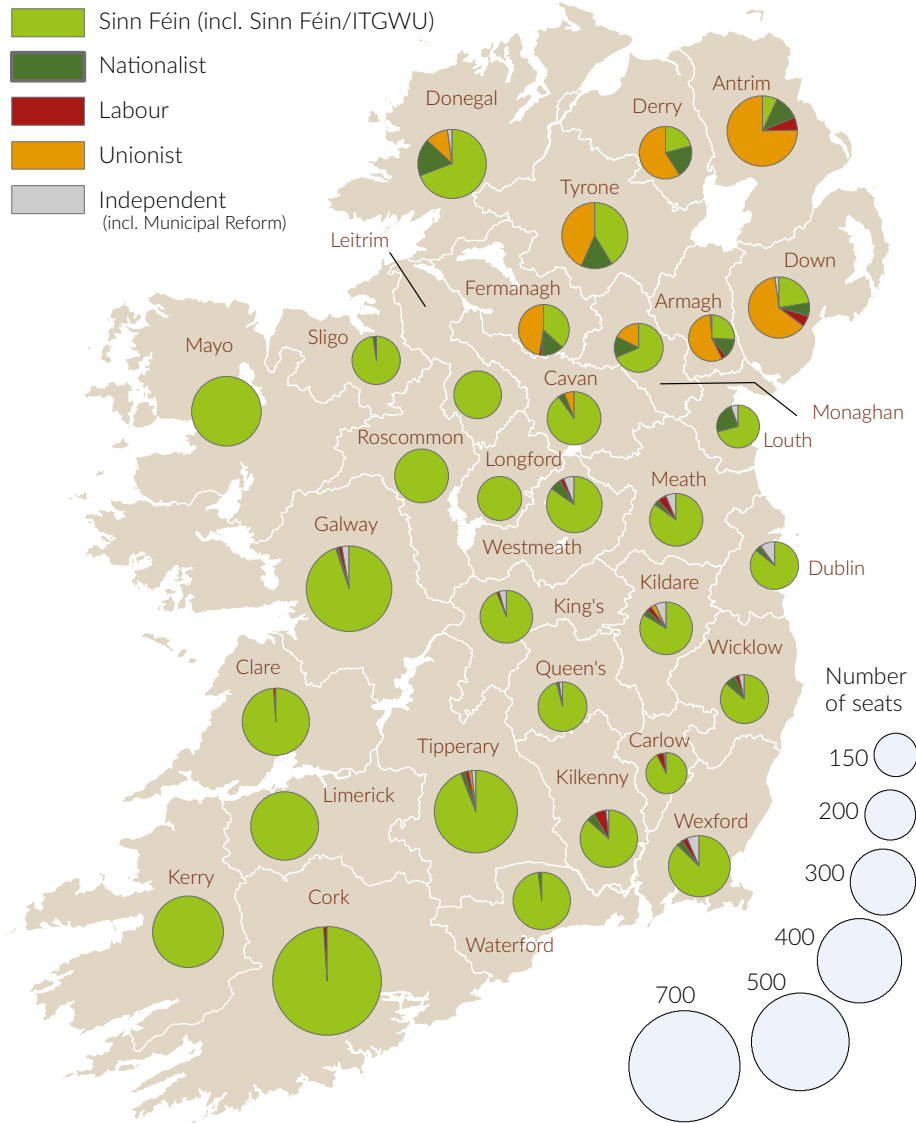
The overall outcome of the elections gave the Department of Local Government much greater clout in the Dáil administration. The Department immediately instructed councils to carefully select chairmen, vice-chairmen and representatives to the General Council of County Councils with 'due regard being paid to National principle, ability and knowledge of local administration'. In practice, this was taken to mean that members of Sinn Féin should be preferred for those positions.



Letter from the general secretariat of Dáil Éireann to the clerk of Longford Urban District Council with regard to the resolution acknowledging the authority of Dáil Éireann, 17 May 1920

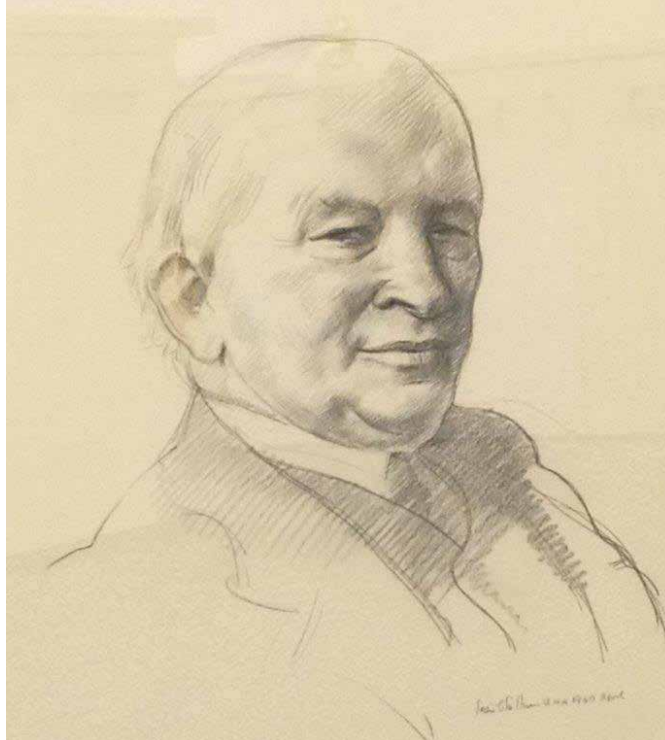
Image courtesy of Longford County Library and Archives

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland



Map showing the share of seats won by parties in each county in the May/June elections, 1920

Image courtesy of Atlas of the Irish Revolution (UCC)



Pencil sketch of P.J. O'Byrne, Cathaoirleach of North Tipperary County Council, 1920-31

Image courtesy of Tipperary County Archives

MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, 1920.

NOTICE TO ELECTORS.

We, the undermentioned, having been unanimously selected by a LARGE AND REPRESENTATIVE MEETING OF THE RATEPAYERS OF WEXFORD, have allowed our names to go forward as Candidates at the forthcoming MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS.

If elected WE PLEDGE OURSELVES to transact the business of the Corporation in a THOROUGHLY EFFICIENT and CAPABLE manner, using our best endeavours to SAFEGUARD THE INTERESTS OF THE RATEPAYERS in every way.

In the interests of EFFICIENCY and ECONOMY, and the WELFARE of the BOROUGH OF WEXFORD, we therefore respectfully solicit your votes.

St. Selskar Ward.

GEORGE HADDEN
(Outgoing).
JAMES BROWNE
(Outgoing).
JOSEPH DOYLE
(Outgoing).
RICHARD GIBSON
(Outgoing).
MINNIE O'CONNOR
HENRY DEMPSEY

St. Iberius Ward.

JAMES SINNOTT
(Outgoing).
PHILIP COWMAN
(Outgoing).
NICHOLAS BYRNE
(Outgoing).
MATTHEW LYMBERY
(Outgoing).
JOHN KIRWAN
(Outgoing).
WM. H. McGUIRE
(Outgoing).
HERBERT THOMPSON

St. Mary's Ward.

CHARLES ROWE
JAMES MURPHY
(Outgoing).
ROBERT COFFEY
(Outgoing).
JAMES BILLINGTON
ALICE FENNELL
PATRICK O'CONNOR

(11906-1)

Printed notice of candidates for the Ratepayers in the 1920 municipal election in Wexford. Alice Fennell was elected for St. Mary's Ward. From The People newspaper, 10 January 1920

Image courtesy of Wexford County Archive

Sinn Féin
THE WOMEN OF WICKLOW
WILL CAST THEIR
FIRST VOTE
FOR
INDEPENDENCE
VOTE FOR
BARTON
AND A
FREE IRELAND

Patrick Mahon, Printer, Yarnhall Street, Dublin

Sinn Féin campaign poster, local elections 1920 Wicklow, urging women to vote for Robert Barton

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland

Women and the 1920 local election

By the time of the 1920 local elections, a degree of progress had already been achieved in terms of female representation at local government level in Ireland. Since 1896, women with certain property qualifications had been eligible for election as poor law guardians. Under the 1898 Local Government Act, they could stand for all the new councils except borough and county councils.

Education played an important part in helping women realise that they had a role to play in the future of their country. Many were actively involved in a number of movements, among them Sinn Féin, Cumann na mBan, the Irish Countrywomen's Association and in the various suffrage and labour campaigns. The Irish Women's Franchise League, in particular, canvassed and encouraged women to put their names forward as candidates in the local elections in 1920. Articles were published in the League's paper, *The Irish Citizen* explaining the process involved and encouraging the female electorate to support their own.

'Let no woman help any group that has not
at least one woman on its ticket'

The Irish Citizen, 5 January 1920

A total of 42 women were elected to local councils in 1920, signalling the way for greater participation of women in the electoral process at local level. Some of those elected were prominent members of Cumann na mBan; some were passionate campaigners for social and healthcare reform.

In the borough and urban elections on 15 January, Mrs Emily Crowe was the first-ever woman elected as part of a Sinn Féin majority on Limerick Corporation. Of 30 female candidates in Dublin and its townships, 14 were elected including Kathleen Clarke and Nell Humphreys. In Carlow, three women were elected in a ward with nine seats¹³.

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland



The Honourable Albinia Broderick, first female member, elected to Kerry County Council in 1920

Image courtesy of The Kerryman photographic archive, Kerry County Archives

Three unionist women were returned in the north-east, two were elected in Derry. While the majority of female candidates were Sinn Féin supporters, a number stood for Independent Labour. Other women reinforced local issues including Alice Fennell, who was elected to Wexford Corporation for the Ratepayers' Association.

There was further success for female candidates in the summer elections for county councils, rural districts and poor law guardians. As in January, some of those selected by Sinn Féin were relatives of the men of 1916 including Lillie Connolly and Margaret Pearse. Lady Albinia Broderick, an Irish republican, was the first female elected to Kerry County Council. Lady Margaret Dockrell, a unionist and former member of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association, was elected to the Monkstown constituency of Dublin County Council. Women also acted as chair or vice-chair in Listowel, Rathdrum, Clifden and Strokestown district councils. Alice Cashel, elected as vice-chair of Galway County Council in 1920 had played a crucial role in the process of reforming local government and bringing it under the authority of Dáil Éireann.



Alice Cashel (elected vice-chair of Galway County Council in June 1920)

Image courtesy of Dr Humphrys

<http://humphrysfamilytree.com/Cashel/al.html>

DÁIL ÉIREANN.

Áiríeáct Ríááááááá Áíreáááá

Department of Local Government

Cir. No. 21.

19th. November 1920.

To the Clerk of each
Borough Council, County Council and
Board of Guardians.
(to be read at the next meeting
of your Board or Council)

Read 27 Nov

A chana,

A Circular has recently been issued by the English Local Government Board calling on rate-collectors to refuse to obey the instructions of their Councils. Having failed to smash Local Administration in Ireland by withholding the usual grants the enemy government is now attempting to do so by obstructing the collection of the rates and the measures that were devised to safeguard the public monies from seizure.

This Department wishes now to outline the attitude it will adopt towards officials of public bodies who fail to carry out instructions of their local authority. If an official, for any reason, is unwilling to carry out instructions the substance of which either emanated in the first instance from this Department or received its sanction, it is open to such official to resign his position and if he is a pensionable officer, consideration will be given to any equitable claim for pension he may submit. If on the other hand an official disagreeing with orders issued to him by his local authority with sanction of this Department clings to his position and endeavours to use his position to thwart the wishes of his employing Council and the wishes of the people represented by that body, this Department will order the immediate dismissal of such official and will give no consideration to any claim he may subsequently make for pension. Officials are reminded that their pensions are paid from the rates, not by the English Government, and no pension from public money can be granted to any official who is dismissed for endeavouring to thwart the will of the people of Ireland.

Mise le meas,

W.T. Cosgrave

Minister for Local Government.

Letter from W.T. Cosgrave, Minister for Local Government regarding collection of rates in local authorities and the repercussions for officials who fail to carry out the duties of their local authority (19 November 1920)
Image courtesy of Waterford City and County Archive IE/WCC/GNA/131

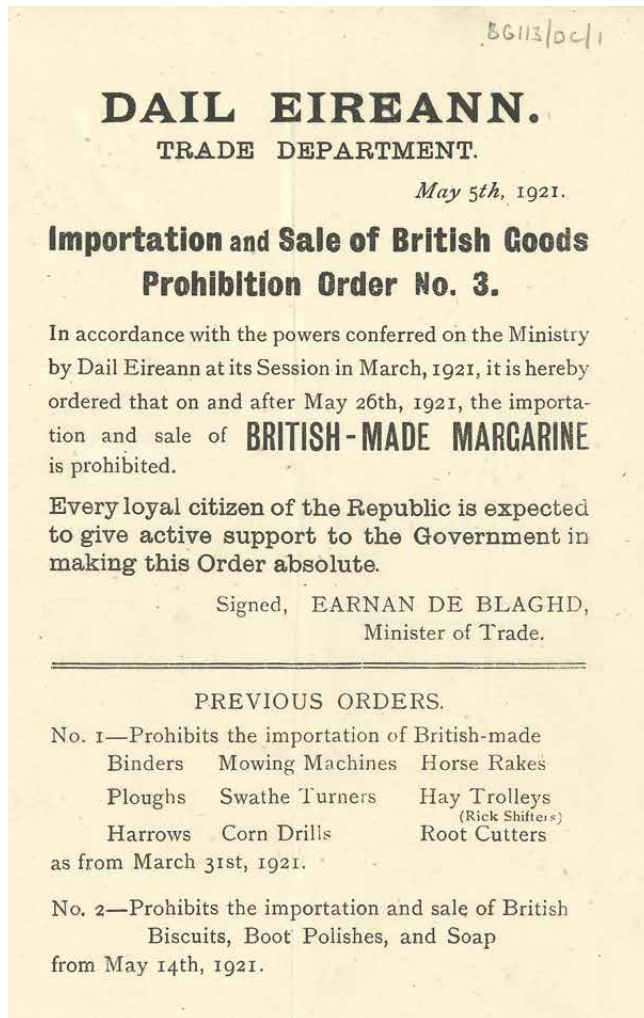
1920-1925 Local government during an unstable period

Following the elections in 1920, the newly-elected councils passed resolutions recognising Dáil Éireann and rejecting the British Local Government Board. This support from local authorities was an important political step in the recognition of the legitimacy of Dáil Éireann and one that had serious consequences for them.

By their refusal to continue to report to the Local Government Board, those local authorities who did so lost the grant assistance paid to them by the Board. Their refusal to hand over rates collected locally also led to legal cases against them. Local authorities were raided by crown forces in an attempt to forcibly access the records. Hiding the books from local government auditors and refusing cooperation resulted in the arrest and jailing of many local authority officials, including town clerks and accountants.

Many of the elected members and staff were also serving in the IRA. In March 1920, the Lord Mayor of Cork, Tomás MacCurtain was assassinated by the RIC and his successor Terence MacSwiney was arrested and went on hunger strike, dying in Brixton prison in October 1920. In 1921 the Mayor of Limerick, George Clancy and former Limerick Mayor, Michael O'Callaghan were also murdered.

Local authorities continued as best they could to function and received instruction from W. T. Cosgrave as Minister for Local Government. The communiqués from Dáil Éireann focused on trying to raise revenue, the difficult task of maintaining rate collection and keeping it from the Local Government Board and on cutting costs to cope with the loss of grants. The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 established the Free State government in the 26 counties. The resulting Civil War left local authorities continuing to struggle to function and rebuild infrastructure and collect the necessary revenue to fund services.

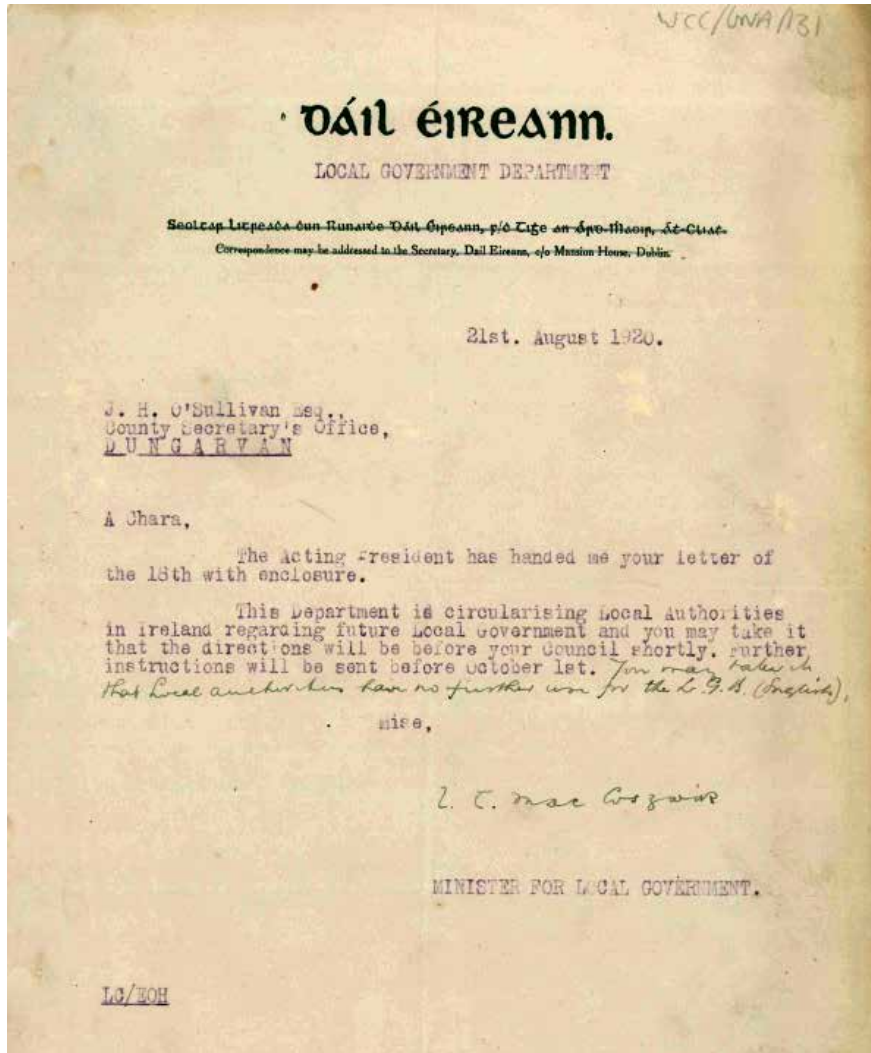


Notice from Ernest Blythe, Minister for Trade, Dáil Éireann regarding prohibition of the importation and sale of British-made margarine, 5 May 1921. From the Longford Board of Guardians collection.

Image courtesy of Longford County Library and Archives

Times remained turbulent for local authorities and some republican-dominated and financially-strapped councils (Dublin City, Cork City, Kerry, Leitrim and Offaly) were replaced by the new Free State Government with centrally-appointed commissioners for a time. The need for local government reform was, however, broadly supported by the general public and the Free State Government turned its attention to the matter and introduced the Local Government Bill, 1924.

The main focus of this reform was the abolition of the rural district councils and boards of guardians and consolidation of their road and health functions into county councils, urban councils and corporations. Boards of health were established with responsibility for sanitary and health services – these were established at county level or, in the case of larger counties, two boards were established. County Medical Officers were appointed to each county with responsibility for health and sanitation. The Bill was withdrawn by the Minister to allow further discussion and amendment, and the Local Government Act, 1925 was enacted in March 1925.



Letter from W. T. Cosgrave advising local authorities that they should have 'no further use of the Local Government Board (English)'

Image courtesy of Waterford City and County Archive IE/WCC/GNA/131

WCC/GNA/88

D A I L É I R E A N N

Cir. No. 24.

Local Government Dept.
13th, December 1920.

In the struggle between the Irish nation and the English government the Local Authorities are playing an important part. Through them the Irish Government has been enabled to take over control of the internal administration of the Country, showing to the world the truth of President de Valera's claim that Dail Eireann is the DE FACTO as well as the DE JURE government of Ireland - harassed it is true by the presence of an English army of occupation but nevertheless fulfilling the ordinary functions of government and receiving the actual and habitual allegiance of the great majority of the citizens. To meet and beat this claim the enemy government has left no stone unturned. The so called "grants" in reality a miserable portion (about a fortieth) of the money wrung from the Country in taxation have been ruthlessly cut off, carrying the war into the hospitals and the unions, smiting the aged poor and the destitute orphan. It is hoped by these methods to bring the Public Bodies of Ireland to their knees, it is hoped that those who would shrink from no sacrifice for themselves will be weakened by the possibility of hardship for the aged and the helpless. The idea of attempting to buy a people with a miserable fraction of their own money is peculiarly English in its cynicism. But the people must not be caught back into slavery. The responsibility is on each Public Body to so husband its finances that the hopes of the enemy of inducing surrender by economic pressure will prove as vain as their hopes to stampede and demoralise the people by murder and arson....Even with the utmost economy there will be a deficit in many cases. This deficit must be met by loan from the banks. This Department believes that where the position is properly and reasonably explained to a bank there will be no disposition shown to embarrass local authorities by a refusal. The banks must not be allowed to make their reappointment as Treasurers a condition precedent to a loan - to do so shows a misconception of the situation. The Banks were deprived of the treasurership not with any view to injuring them but with a view to protecting public monies from inequitable seizure. To have their accounts in debit would have been no protection, as a Bank as Treasurer would have been ordered to pay on foot of Decrees "out of the first monies of the Council coming into your control" and could not set up its own private debt as against such decree. Further a Bank as Treasurer would be compelled to make the fullest disclosures as to the funds of any Public Body while under present arrangements though the Bank will no doubt have the handling of the funds of local authorities as heretofore, it will have no knowledge on the subject. The Banks must not be allowed to attach obnoxious conditions to loans to local authorities: neither must they be allowed if offered reasonable security to embarrass local authorities by refusing loans. They exist and flourish by the good-will of the people - they cannot be allowed to come into the ring against the people's re-

This page and following page:

Local Government Department, Dáil Éireann. Circular of 13 December 1920, showing how the results of the local elections has enabled the Irish Government to take over control of the internal administration of the country. Image courtesy of Waterford City and County Archive IE/WCA/WCC/GNA/88

enemy in this struggle. Councils should if necessary wield the great power they undoubtedly possess to prove to any bank that refuses facilities, that to do so - always provided fair terms and security is offered - amounts to an will be issued a set of war against the Irish people On this question of security circumstances will vary considerably in different places. It is put as a suggestion that if necessary each member of a Council should set himself to secure the lodging of say £50 by a dozen or twenty people, the sums so lodged to be deemed collateral security against an overdraft to the Council's representatives while each individual acting in this way as security would have as his security against loss the rates of the County. . . The enemy are basing all their hopes on a financial breakdown on the part of Public Bodies necessitating a return to the Custom House fold. It would be impossible to overestimate the need for local effort to defeat these hopes. The enemy is watching every move of the Local Bodies. lately when a Council in the mistaken idea that to be in overdraft would render its funds immune from seizure re-appointed the Bank its Treasurer the matter got a blazing headline in the English Press "COUNTY COUNCIL REPUDIATES BANK DEBT". The line must be held. With only four months of the financial year to run there must be no collapse of Local Government. The Public Bodies must not let down the Nation.

C. Ó. h. Uigéin

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT.

Some notable figures of the 1920 local elections



Robert Childers Barton

Image courtesy of Houses of the Oireachtas www.dail100.ie

Robert Barton (1881-1975). An extensive landowner and former British army officer, Robert joined the republican movement after witnessing the ill-treatment of the 1916 leaders in Dublin. As TD for West Wicklow, he was elected Minister for Agriculture at the first Dáil sitting in 1919. Arrested in February 1919 for making seditious speeches, he was elected as chairman of Wicklow County Council in June 1920 during his detention. Re-elected to the Dáil in 1922, he was imprisoned later that year for his activities in the Civil War. He lost his seat in the general election of 1923 and was released from prison in December 1923. He did not seek election again, but held a number of public appointments thereafter.



Thomas D. Sinnott

Image from the T.D. Sinnott collection at Wexford County Archive

Thomas D. Sinnott (1893-1965). Poet, linguist, secondary school teacher, historian and public administrator. T.D. took a prominent part in the 1916 Easter Rising in Enniscorthy and was arrested for his involvement with periods of detention in Stafford Jail and Frongoch until his release in December 1916. He was elected to Enniscorthy Urban District Council in 1920 and served as chairman of Enniscorthy Board of Guardians in June that year. Re-arrested for his activities during the War of Independence, he was appointed secretary to the Wexford County Board of Health in 1922. He was appointed first County Manager of Wexford County Council in 1942, a post he held until his retirement in 1953.



Terence MacSwiney

Image from the Liam de Róiste collection at Cork City and County Archives

Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920). A poet and playwright who was involved in nationalist causes from an early period, Terence was one of the chief organisers and commanders of the Irish Volunteers in Cork from 1914. He was elected to the First Dáil in 1918 as Sinn Féin TD for Mid Cork and served as councillor with Cork City Council on his election in January 1920. He was elected as Lord Mayor of Cork and Commanding Officer of Cork No.1 Brigade Irish Volunteers following the assassination of Tomás MacCurtain in March 1920. He died on hunger strike at Brixton Prison, London on 25 October 1920.



George Nicholls

Image courtesy of Galway County Council

George Nicholls (ca. 1886-1942) was a Dublin-born solicitor with strong links to Arthur Griffith. A prominent member of the Irish Volunteers Galway City Corps, he was arrested and interned during Easter Week 1916. He was elected to Galway County Council in 1920 and served as chairman, 1920-25. He voted in favour of the ratification of the Treaty. Serving as TD from 1921-27, he held the post of Assistant Minister for Home Affairs for a period in 1922 and as parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Defence, 1925-27.

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland



**Hanna and Francis
Sheehy-Skeffington**

Image courtesy of Dublin City
Library & Archive

Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington (1877-1946). Elected member of Dublin City Council, 1920-1924. Well-remembered as one of Ireland's early feminists but it is little-known that in the local elections of January 1920, she was elected to Dublin City Council as a Sinn Féin representative. Her interests were mainly social development through education, as she served on a number of committees, including Public Libraries – which she chaired – Old Age Pensions, School Attendance Board, Technical Education and Scholarships. She continued to serve on the elected Dublin City Council until it was abolished by the Free State Government in May 1924.



Cllr. Kate Breen

Image courtesy of The
Kerryman

Catherine (Kate) Breen (1869-1937). Daughter of a Killarney Urban District Council official, Kate served in Cumann na mBan during the 1916 Rising and was subsequently arrested and interned. She was later arrested for her part in promoting Sinn Féin politics during the 1918 General Election campaign. Elected to Killarney Urban District Council in January 1920, one of her first acts was to propose a suite of street name changes to reflect a republican Killarney. She was elected to Kerry County Council in 1926 and 1928 and also served as Chair of the County Board of Health and Public Assistance and as Vice-Chair of the General Council of County Councils.

ROBERT MOORE
CLERK OF COUNCIL.

Inishowen Rural District Council.

→***←
WORKHOUSE.

Carndonagh, 25th May 1920

Dear Charlie,

I don't know what put it
in my head that Thursday was the day
of our election but I have the impression
I told you the counting would be
on Friday and Saturday (week). Wed. &
Thursday 2nd & 3rd pm are the
days and I hope they will suit
Your convenience equally well.
Mr. Moore's official appointment for
You herewith and also the names
of the candidates in the two areas
to be counted.

Hoping You are all quite well
I remain.

Yours sincerely

Edward O'Donnell

Letter from Edward O'Donnell, Inishowen Rural District
Council, to Charlie [O'Callaghan, Returning Officer] regarding
the dates of counting of votes in the local elections,
25 May 1920

Image courtesy of Donegal County Archives

Endnotes

Local Government reform

- 1 Dowell, R.B., 'Administration and the public services 1870-1921' in A new history of Ireland VI: Ireland under the Union II 1870-1921, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford University Press, 1996), p593
- 2 Lyons, F.S.L., 'The aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903' in A new history of Ireland VI: Ireland under the Union II 1870-1921, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford University Press, 1996), p594
- 3 Creedon, William P., Exemplar Hiberniae, 100 Years of local government in Ireland, p16
- 4 Ferriter, Diarmaid, Lovers of liberty? Local government in 20th century Ireland (National Archives of Ireland, Dublin, 2001), p9
- 5 Dáil100, Houses of the Oireachtas, <https://www.dail100.ie/en/long-reads/local-government-elections>
- 6 Gallagher, Frank, The four glorious years 1918-1921 (Blackwater Press, 1953), p44
- 7 Ibid, p72

January 1920 elections – borough and urban councils

- 8 Kee, Robert, Ireland: a history (London, 2003), p180
- 9 Dundee Courier, 24 January 1920
- 10 <https://www.dail100.ie/en/long-reads/local-government-elections>
- 11 <https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/municipal-elections-sinn-fein-and-labour-perform-strongly-as-unionists-falt>
- 12 <https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/revolutionary-government-in-ireland-dail-eireann-1919-1922-arthur-mitchell-gill-and-macmillan/>

Women and the 1920 local elections

- 13 <https://www.thejournal.ie/1920-women-vote-4969283-Jan2020>

Recommended reading

Web links to articles

<https://www.dail100.ie/en/long-reads/local-government-elections/>

<https://www.historyireland.com/20th-century-contemporary-history/pr-the-sligo-borough-election-of-1919/>

http://proinsias.net/publications/pr_in_ireland/2006/08/why-ireland-chose-pr.html

<https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/elections-to-be-held-under-proportional-representation-for-the-first-time>

<https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/municipal-elections-sinn-fein-and-labour-perform-strongly-as-unionists-falt>

<https://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/britain-the-proportional-representation-question-a-lesson-from-ireland-1920>

Carmel Quinlan, Standing up for women in politics <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/century/century-women-and-the-vote/standing-up-for-women-in-politics-1.553520>

Mary Cullen, A history of her story

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/heritage/century/century-women-and-the-vote/a-history-of-her-story-1.553415>

Margaret Ward

www.thejournal.ie/readme/1920-women-vote-4969283-Jan2020

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Newspapers

The Sligo Champion, 1920
The Freeman's Journal, 1920
The People, 1920
Connacht Tribune, 1920

Publications

Ferriter, Diarmaid, 'Lovers of Liberty'? Local Government in 20th century Ireland (Dublin, 2001)

Hall, Donal, The Irish Revolution, 1912-23 (Dublin, 2019)

Kee, Robert, Ireland: A History (London, 2003)

Lee, J.J., Ireland 1912-1985 Politics and Society (Cambridge, 2004)

O'Sullivan, Harold, A History of Local Government in the County of Louth, from earliest times to the Present (Dublin, 2000)

Macardle, Dorothy, The Irish republic (London, 1968)

Appendix 1 Results of the county council elections in June 1920 as transcribed from the *Freeman's Journal*, 12 June 1920

Counties highlighted in **bold** below represent amended details of seat numbers and party affiliations than what was published in the *Freeman's Journal*

LEINSTER	Total Seats	Seats by Party
Dublin	19	SF 12; Lab and SF 2; Ind. 2; Unionist 3
Meath	21	SF 20; Farmers' Union 1
Kildare	21	SF 15; Lab 5; Ind. N. 1
King's Co. (Offaly)	21	SF 19; Lab 2
Queen's Co. (Laois)	22	SF 18; Lab. Repub. 3; Unionist 1
Louth	28	SF 17; Trade & Lab. 2; Ind. 3; HR Party 6
Westmeath	23	SF 15; Lab. 5; Nat. 3
Longford	20	SF 20
Wicklow	20	SF 14; SF Lab. 3; Farmers' Assoc. 2; Nat. 1
Wexford	19	SF 12; Lab. 7
Kilkenny	19	SF 16; Lab. 2; Nat. 1
Carlow	20	SF 13; Lab. 7

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

MUNSTER	Total Seats	Seats by Party
Tipperary (North)	20	SF 19; Lab. 1
Tipperary (South)	23	SF 23
Cork	32	SF 32
Limerick	20	SF 20
Kerry	20	SF 20
Waterford	20	SF 17; Lab. Repub. 3
Clare	20	SF 20

CONNAUGHT	Total Seats	Seats by Party
Galway	20	SF 20
Mayo	24	SF 24
Roscommon	20	SF 20
Sligo	20	SF 19; Lab. Repub. 1
Leitrim	19	SF 19

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

ULSTER	Total Seats	Seats by Party
Donegal	20	SF 15; Nat. 3; U. 2
Derry	19	SF 4; Nat. 4; Unionist 11
Antrim	21	Unionist 17; Ind. U. 1; Nat. 2; SF 1
Armagh	23	SF 5; Nat. 3; Unionist 14; Ind. 1
Down	20	Unionist 13; SF 4; Lab. 2; Nat. 1
Tyrone	26	SF 8; Nat. 7; Unionist 11
Fermanagh	20	SF 6; Nat. 5; Unionist 9
Monaghan	20	SF 16; Unionist 4
Cavan	21	SF 20; Nat. 1

Appendix 2 List of local authority archives services in Ireland

Carlow County Council	Clare County Council
Carlow County Archive, County Library, Tullow Street, Carlow	Clare County Archives, Clare County Council, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare
Tel: 059 9129705	Tel: 065 6846271
Email: lkennedy@carlowcoco.ie	Email: archives@clarecoco.ie
Web: www.carlowlibraries.ie/explore/local-studies	Web: www.clarelibrary.ie
Cork City & County Council	Donegal County Council
Cork City and County Archives, Cork City Council, Seamus Murphy Building, 32 Great William O'Brien Street, Cork City	Donegal County Archives, Donegal County Council, Three Rivers Centre, Lifford, Co. Donegal
Tel: 021 4505886	Tel: 074 9172490
Email: brian_mcgee@corkcity.ie	Email: archivist@donegalcoco.ie
Web: www.corkarchives.ie	Web: www.donegalcoco.ie/culture/archives/
Dublin City Council	Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown
Dublin City Archives, c/o Dublin City Libraries & Archive, 138-144 Pearse Street, Dublin 2	dLr Libraries, dLr Lexicon, Haigh Terrace, Moran Park, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin
Tel: 01 6744996	Tel: 01 2362722
Email: cityarchives@dublincity.ie	Email: dgunning@dlrcoco.ie
Web: www.dublincity.ie	Web: www.libraries.dlrcoco.ie

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Fingal County Council	Galway County Council
Fingal Local Studies & Archives, 46 North Street, Swords, Co. Dublin	Galway County Council Archives. c/o Galway County Library, Island House, Cathedral Square, Galway Co. Galway
Tel: 01 8704496	Tel: 091 509388
Email: karen.delacey@fingal.ie	Email: archivist@galwaycoco.ie
Web: www.fingal.ie	Web: www.galway.ie/archives
Kerry County Council	Limerick City & County Council
Kerry County Archive, c/o Kerry County Library HQ, Moyderwell, Tralee, Co. Kerry	Limerick City and County Archives, 58 O'Connell Street. Limerick Co. Limerick
Tel: 066 7121200	Tel: 061 496526
Email: archivist@kerrycoco.ie	Email: jacqui.hayes@limerick.ie
Web: www.kerrylibrary.ie	Web: www.limerickcoco.ie www.limerickcorp.ie
Longford County Council	Louth County Council
Longford County Library & Archives, Town Centre, Longford Co. Longford	Louth County Archives Service, Old Gaol, Ardee Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth
Tel: 043 3341124	Tel: 042 9324358
Email: mmorris@longfordcoco.ie	Email: archive@louthcoco.ie
Web: www.longfordlibrary.ie	Web: www.louthcoco.ie

Democracy and Change | The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland

Offaly County Council		Tipperary County Council	
Offaly Archives, Unit 1F Axis Business Park, Clara Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly		Tipperary County Archives, Tipperary Local Authority Complex, Carrigeen Business Park, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary	
Tel: 057 9321421 / 057 9339968		Tel: 0761 065319 / 0761 065000	
Email: info@offalyhistory.com		Email: rachel.granville@tipperarycoco.ie	
Web: www.offalyarchives.com		Web: www.tipperarycoco.ie	
Waterford City & County Council		Wexford County Council	
Waterford City and County Archive, High Street / Dungarvan Library, Waterford / Davitt's Quay, Dungarvan, Co. Waterford		Wexford County Archive, 6A Ardavan Business Park, Ardavan, Co. Wexford	
Tel: 076 1102144 / 058 21144		Tel: 053 9196572	
Email: archivist@waterfordcouncil.ie		Email: archivist@wexfordcoco.ie	
Web: www.waterfordcouncil.ie		Web: www.wexfordcountyarchive.com	
Wicklow County Council			
Wicklow County Archives, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Whitegates, Wicklow Town			
Tel: 0404 20126			
Email: cwright@wicklowcoco.ie			
Web: www.wicklow.ie			