

Liffey Champion

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Sallins the fastest growing town in Europe - Lawless

Sallins has grown from 500 people in the 1999 census to 5,000 in the most recent census, a 1,000% increase, and at one stage it was labelled the fastest growing town in Europe, North Kildare Fianna Fáil Deputy James Lawless told the Dáil.

Speaking during a debate on the National Spatial Strategy, he said this has happened without any amenities being added, such as additional playing fields. “Thankfully, the rail infrastructure has begun to creep back into gear and has improved greatly, but there is still a long way to go and we are again seeing the problem of overloaded trains and buses, and of services being inadequate to cater for the demand, given current capacity,” he said.

“Amenities have been an issue for a long time. On housing, we have come from a situation of having a surplus to having a massive deficit, as we are all now well aware, yet we have done nothing in the meantime to fill the amenity gaps in those spaces. We now have a very real need for multiples of housing units to be delivered but let us hope that, this time, we do not make the mistake of the past, which was to deliver them in isolation, without the services, infrastructure and amenities to support them.”

Deputy Lawless said the fundamental concept of having people living in the commuter counties and working in Dublin is a viable one, but it is a difficult one at present because of the lack of public transport linkage, educational infrastructure and other amenities.

“If we can fill those gaps, it is an answer to the housing crisis, among other things, because it would make it possible, attractive and feasible for people to live in farther-flung places yet enjoy access to work, in order to further their careers, and access to education,” he said. “In this way, it becomes an enabler because people are able to attend universities a little further from home, without having to break the bank to do so, if they can commute to access educational institutions.”

Criticism of regular breaches of housing standards in private sector

Flagrant breaches of fire safety minimum standards in the private rental sector are unfortunately all too common, Dublin Mid-West Sinn Féin Deputy Eoin Ó Broin told the Dáil. Opening a debate on his party’s motion on private rental housing standards he said levels of overcrowding in clear breach of the provisions of section 63 of the Housing Act 1966 are widespread and refusal to carry out basic maintenance is a regular complaint of tenants across the State.

While a small number of local authorities have an acceptable level of inspections, the overwhelming majority do not, he said. “Last year, the National Oversight and Audit Commission report on the private rental sector made for some very stark reading,” he said. “Some seven local authorities had inspection levels of less than 2%. Some five councils had inspection rates of between 2% and 4%, ten more had inspection rates of between 4% and

10%, while five councils had inspection rates of between 10% and 12%. Only four local authorities, which deserve mentioning, had rates of between 20% and 34%. They are Roscommon County Council, Monaghan County Council, Cavan County Council and South Dublin County Council. Of the 64 staff working in local authorities on private rental sector issues, a mere 29 were dealing directly with inspections of private rental properties in the year which the report surveyed.”

Deputy Ó Broin said that if rogue landlords know that their chances of being inspected are less than 4%, and even less in some cases, of course abuses are bound to occur, especially in a housing market where supply is low, demand is rising and prices are high.

“However, it is important to acknowledge that local authorities should not shoulder all of the blame for the failure of the inspection and enforcement regime,” he said. “They have seen levels of staff slashed by up to 30% since 2008. We all know that local authority housing departments are struggling to cope with an ever-deepening housing and homelessness crisis and ever-increasing demands on front-line staff time. Increasing the number of inspections to an adequate level will require additional resourcing from central government. If some councils can achieve inspection levels of 25% annually, that should be set as the target for all as a matter of urgency. Resourcing should not be an obstacle.”

Major problem with delivery of home care packages

There is a major problem with the delivery of home care packages and home care services by approved care providers, North Kildare Fianna Fáil Deputy Frank O’Rourke told the Dáil.

He said page 54 of the Programme for Government contains a commitment to increase the funding for the delivery of home care packages and home care services. However, he said there is a major disconnect between the HSE, the service provider and the end user which is causing serious problems.

“I have raised this in the House on numerous occasions and raised it directly with the Minister for Health when I met him in July in his office,” he said. “We need this issue to be prioritised so that we can help the thousands of people who need these services but who are not getting them at the moment. I ask the Taoiseach to give a commitment that he will have this issue prioritised so that we can improve the services for the most vulnerable people who need them on a daily basis.”

In response, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said there was certainly additional funding this year for home care packages and there will be again in 2018.