

Connacht Tribune

By Tim Ryan, Oireachtas Correspondent

Galway rents up 14.5 per cent

Rents in County Galway have risen 14.5% in the last year, Sinn Fein Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh told the Upper House.

Speaking during a debate on rented accommodation, he said a search for three bed properties available in Galway city today on *daft.ie* shows landlords are seeking up to €2,200 a month for a very ordinary three bedroom house, with seven beds in the three rooms.

“Recent comments by the Taoiseach on the ability of people on average wage to buy what he called an affordable house of €315,000 show how out of touch he and Government are from the reality of the national housing crisis,” he said. “I note that Fianna Fáil has commented this morning on these figures calling them ‘scandalous’, yet at the same time it has opposed every effort by Sinn Féin to address the underlying issues of soaring rents and family evictions.”

He said Sinn Féin had introduced numerous Bills and proposals in the Houses of the Oireachtas on rent control and rent certainty, homelessness, protecting mortgage holders and so on, but the real scandal is that Fianna Fáil had supported Fine Gael to defeat these measures every time. “Our proposals would have saved young families thousands of euros, allowing them to save for deposits and give them some hope that they may at some stage escape the clutches of greedy landlords,” he said. “Fianna Fáil is as much to blame for this appalling situation as Fine Gael.”

Landlords renting properties on short-term lease platforms have seen their profits increase greatly while the available rental stock for ordinary citizens and families has dramatically decreased, he said. “The impact of short-term lettings on the rental market is not only seen in Dublin, it is a nationwide phenomenon,” he added. “When one compares Airbnb figures in Galway with those for longer term lets on *daft.ie*, on 1 May 2017, there were 13.5% more properties to let on a short-term basis on Airbnb than the total number of properties for the combined provinces of Connacht and Ulster on *daft.ie*.”

Criticism of zealot approach to public services card

The case of a Galway constituent who wanted to get a driver's licence but not get it because he did not have a public services card and could not get the card because he did not have a driver's licence or a passport, was raised in the Dáil by Galway West Fianna Fáil Deputy Eamon Ó Cúiv. Social welfare, he said, took a practical view and issued the card on reasonable evidence of an out-of-date licence.

He told Minister Paschal Donohoe that the demand for the public services card is being demanded as an absolute, only way of identifying oneself. He asked the Minister to consider that in most cases one would have to produce suitable evidence of one's identity which would

include a passport, a card or other suitable identification because the people who likely do not have it are older people who are well settled in the community and who are easily identified.

“If, however, the Department states one must have the card the most likely person to get trapped is somebody who is known to everybody but the rule states the person has to have the card and he or she gets caught, literally, in a vicious circle,” he said.

Deputy Ó Cúiv also criticised the design of the card. “I have to say the writing on it, for example, the PPS number, is very small for older people,” he said. “It is much better on the medical card where it is much bigger. It is a small, but important, point because this is used commonly by older people accessing services.”

In response, minister Donohoe said he would take on board the point Deputy Ó Cúiv made about the writing on it and he would pass it on to his colleagues who are working on it. “As the Deputy will be aware, the people who are making the greatest use of it at present tend to be our older citizens,” he said. “They are accessing it either for free travel or to access payments to which they are entitled.”

“On the zealot approach that Deputy Ó Cuív talked about, we have a challenge here,” he said. “We want to get to a point where this card is used by citizens to access services because I believe the issue of ensuring that we are providing valuable services to those who are meant to get them will become more important in the future.”