

Homelessness and the local connection to Meath

“We cannot proceed with a situation where the only time we see action or even commentary from the government is after an RTE Investigates program exposes a scandal” Tweet from Ógra Aontú Tuesday 19th January following a heartrending exposé on RTE 1 of the worsening problem of homelessness and deficient government policy in recent years. We cannot allow a repeat of the record number of homeless deaths in Dublin and across the country. The cost of running this failed system of temporary housing for those that society has left behind is inordinate and that’s before we look at the more egregious humanitarian cost.

What this program has done is shine a much-needed light on the emerging situation of homeless people in Dublin who are from outside the capital being denied access to an emergency bed because they are registered to a different county. Despite claims from the Minister of Housing Daragh O’Brien that ‘local connection’ is no barrier to any person accessing emergency accommodation in a given county, this is not the practical experience on the ground. Only last week, a mother of 3 came to me looking for emergency accommodation. Although registered to Laois, she wanted to return to Meath where she was born. She was not offered emergency accommodation but is being assessed for HAP, a housing support option that places her and her children in a long queue for private accommodation, a rare commodity currently in this county. What are her prospects unless we step in to help her?

Extraordinary amounts of tax payers’ money goes on hostels, B & Bs and other short term housing measures. Our bill is climbing and our homeless are being failed. The Minister for Housing speaks of local connection but really there is only disconnection between the plan to fix the problem and the outcomes for those living the problem. Whoever is benefiting from the current homeless housing strategy it is certainly not those for whom it was designed.