

Labour aims to ban landlords from charging to view rentals

Paul O'Donoghue
Ireland Business Reporter

A bill is being brought forward to stop landlords charging prospective tenants a viewing fee, days after it was reported that people had been asked to pay up to €500.

Jan O'Sullivan, Labour's housing spokeswoman, said that she was shocked to hear that landlords and letting agents were asking people to pay just to view rental properties.

"The idea that landlords are charging viewing fees is taking advantage of people who find themselves at the centre of the housing crisis," she said.

"The Labour Party has produced legislation to ban this unscrupulous practice. There are already many barriers and stresses for renters, we don't need this kind of carry on to become a trend."

The bill states that a landlord or letting agent shall not charge fees as a condition of prospective tenants being given access to view the dwelling before entering into a tenancy agreement.

It comes days after Threshold, a housing charity, reported that people were being asked to pay to view properties. Last Thursday the organisation said that one woman was asked to pay €500 for a viewing, and another was charged a €300 deposit before inspecting a flat.

Threshold said that the charges were an increasingly common occurrence.

A spokeswoman for the Labour Party said that the bill had been drafted in response to Threshold's reports and

that it would probably go before the Dáil next week.

"We would hope that Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil would support it, it affects everyone in the middle of a rental crisis," she said.

The spokeswoman denied that the bill had been drawn up too quickly after

the Threshold report. "The market moves fast and we have to be able to react to these things to protect renters," she said, adding that much of the bill referred to existing legislation, such as defining what an offence would be under the new law.

Eoghan Murphy, the housing minister, has said that he plans to introduce stronger protections for renters to increase stability in the market as the cost of renting continues to rise.

The most recent figures from the Residential Tenancies Board found that the average rent was €1,094 per month in the second quarter of this year. This was up from €1,017 in the same period last year.

The bill comes as a study reveals that many people think that the ideal age at which to buy a first home is between 25 and 29. A poll of 1,000 people found that 41 per cent regarded this age range as the ideal time.

The study, carried out by iReach on behalf of Royal London, an insurance and pensions company, found that 40 per cent said that between 30 and 34 was the best age range for first-time buyers.

These two age ranges were by far the most popular, with far fewer people say-

ing that below 25 or above 35 was the best time to get a foot on the property ladder.

Statistics published by the Banking & Payments Federation Ireland in March found that the age of the average first-time buyer had risen from 31 in 2008 to 34 last year — at the very upper end of what people think is a good age at which to buy.

Barry McCutcheon, of Royal London, said that as the age of first-time buyers in Ireland continued to rise, "it would appear that moving out and buying your first property at the most desirable age is beyond reach for most people".

