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James Dornan MSP
Convener
Local Government and Communities Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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20 September 2019

Dear James

I am writing to provide an update on the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership's National Empty Homes Survey as discussed during my recent evidence session.

The Partnership has a good record on identifying empty homes to be brought back into use and engaging with private homeowners to do so. As we discussed in Committee, both the Partnership and Ministers want to ensure we can go further and ensure we target our resources on achieving the best results.

Consequently, the Partnership have been engaging with local authorities over the summer to develop a deeper understanding of the distribution of empty homes across Scotland. The Survey aims to establish whether there is a link between the reasons why homes initially become empty and why, in some cases, they often remain empty for the longer term. The Partnership, and our network of Empty Homes Officers, have developed a range of tools to unlock empty homes; the results of the Survey will ensure that they are deployed to best effect. The Partnership will also use the results to identify areas where intensive initiatives would be beneficial and areas where new approaches may be needed.

The Partnership extended the deadline for completion and have been working with the Association of Local Authority Chief Housing Officers to ensure maximum participation. I am pleased to say that 26 local authorities have responded to date and a number of local authorities have indicated that they would welcome a more rigorous discussion with the researchers to provide additional information about the local housing market in their areas to help put the data into context. This information will feed into our internal review of empty homes and inform our discussions as we develop our approach to Housing to 2040.

You also asked how the data will provide a more accurate picture of empty homes in Scotland. In terms of counting the number of long-term empty homes accurately it is important to note that privately owned empty homes are classified and counted through the

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council tax system. One of the first tasks when new empty homes officers take up their role is to undertake a data cleanse of council tax records as they work through their caseloads. This has already resulted in more accurate picture of empty homes across Scotland which will continue to improve as more local authorities get on board with the Partnership approach.

During my evidence session I also committed to write to CoSLA and local authorities and have attached a copy of my letter for the Committee's records.

Yours sincerely

KEVIN STEWART

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