LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE
CALL FOR VIEW ON EMPTY HOMES IN SCOTLAND
SUBMISSION FROM VELUX COMPANY LTD

About the VELUX Company Ltd.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide evidence to the Committee on the issue of empty homes.

Part of the VELUX Group, the VELUX Company Ltd is a Fife-based business which operates across UK and Ireland. Our parent company VKR Holding A/S is a Danish organisation owned principally by a charitable foundation, the Villum Fonden. For more than 70 years, VELUX roof windows have created better and healthier living environments for people around the world, and the company has a passion for using natural daylight and fresh air to improve our homes, schools and workplaces. Our interest relates to new build housing as well and renovations and extensions.

Submission (general comments and selected questions)

We would suggest that as well as bringing empty properties back into use, the Committee consider the wider implications and benefits that could be gained from interventions. For example, as well as making more properties available, any incentives which relate to the renovation of properties can also link to measures which make properties more energy efficient to assist meeting the Scottish Government climate change targets, and improving the overall comfort and quality of the building. This ensures that occupants’ health is not impacted because of poor housing. In other words, any incentives to bring properties back into use should take a holistic approach and go beyond making the property merely habitable.

2. Is this a problem which affects all tenures of housing? Please provide further information to explain your answer.

Further research would be helpful to understand the breakdown of tenure type in relation to empty homes. It might be assumed that the private rented sector is less affected given that there will always be an incentive for an owner to have their property let, but it may be that their particular property is in a hard to let area.

5. Are you aware of any areas which have made progress in addressing the issue of empty homes and if so, what other local authorities could learn?

VELUX is aware of some other initiatives that the Committee could consider. For example, the Republic of Ireland government has recently produced a practical guide called ‘Bringing Back Homes: Manual for the Re-use of Existing Buildings’ (link). We
would suggest that, as regards properties which have fallen into a state of disrepair and can neither be occupied nor let, such a resource supported by Scottish Government could help those property owners daunted by the process. It provides useful information about the options that they could do, both in terms of utilising existing dwellings and converting non-domestic for residential use.

6. How effective are current tools open to local authorities/central government to deal with empty homes? Should they have more powers?

There are two broad approaches that government could take. Either by disincentivising owners who keep their properties empty or incentivising them to make homes available. One potential barrier as regards properties in need of improvements is the cost. One such solution would be to provide, under certain conditions, tax breaks to allow properties to be brought up to standard. The most apparent option would be to extend the exemption from VAT which applies to new builds, to renovations/extensions, notwithstanding that this is a Reserved matter and not something for which the Scottish Parliament could legislate. Other financial incentives could however be looked at that fall within the competency of the Scottish Parliament.

8. Is there enough information/data to provide an accurate picture of empty homes in Scotland? If not, how could this be improved?

While it may be difficult to ascertain, data on the nature of an empty property could provide guidance as to what interventions might be most appropriate.

Yours faithfully

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