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ce/y

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PES 1989 - DOE (CENTRAL)

Your Secretary of State copied to mine his letter of ~~31~~ ¹⁹ May to the Chief Secretary. I would like to comment on a particular point which affects Scotland.

Paragraph 14 states in connection with the discussion of policies for the homeless that there are 50,000 empty (and fit) council houses in Scotland. This figure is in fact a very considerable overstatement. I expect this has arose from the discussion which our Ministers recently had on the rents into mortgages scheme in the course of which Mr Ridley asked for an estimate of the currently available housing surplus in Scotland. He was given an off the cuff estimate that 3%-5% of the council stock might already be vacant and it seems that he has applied this to a total figure of one million council houses in Scotland. In fact, the total number of council houses in Scotland is now down to around 800,000; and the number of empty houses is at or below the bottom end of the range suggested. Our latest estimates suggest that there are only around 20,000 vacant local authority dwellings in Scotland and that some two-thirds of these are not available for letting, chiefly because they are awaiting or undergoing improvement or being held to accommodate households decanted during improvement or repair. The amount of housing stock readily available for use is therefore considerably less than the letter suggests.

The possible policies on homelessness set out at paragraph 15 of your Secretary of State's letter clearly raise much wider issues which need discussion at E(LF).

Copies of this letter go to the Private Secretaries of the recipients of Mr Ridley's letter.

Yours sincerely,
David Crawley
DAVID CRAWLEY
Private Secretary

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