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Scotland Targets Empty Homes in New Crackdown Plan

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The Scottish Government is launching stricter measures to tackle the rising number of vacant properties across the country, aiming to ease the housing crisis and boost community regeneration.

The Scottish Government has unveiled a new strategy to address the growing problem of empty homes across the country. As part of its broader commitment to tackling the housing shortage, the government is giving local councils stronger powers to bring long-term vacant properties back into use.

With thousands of homes lying empty for extended periods, ministers say these unused properties represent a missed opportunity during a time when housing demand continues to rise. The new measures will support local authorities in identifying, managing, and repurposing these empty homes to help meet local housing needs.

Under the new plan, councils will be able to increase the council tax premium on properties that have been left unoccupied for over a year. The aim is to encourage homeowners and landlords to either sell or rent out their vacant properties. The current rules allow councils to charge up to double the standard rate, but the government is now considering increasing that limit further to give councils more flexibility.

The government is also working closely with the Scottish Empty Homes Partnership, a program that supports efforts to bring vacant homes back into use. This collaboration has already helped return thousands of homes to the market, and officials believe strengthening this approach can yield even better results.

Housing Minister Paul McLennan said the initiative is part of a wider effort to maximise the use of existing housing stock. “We cannot afford to let homes sit empty while so many people need decent, affordable housing,” he said. “Tackling long-term empties helps not only those looking for homes but also supports the regeneration of local communities.”

Experts agree that long-term vacant homes can hurt neighbourhoods, contributing to blight and discouraging investment. By reducing the number of empty homes, the government hopes to improve community wellbeing and boost local economies.

According to data from the Scottish Government, there are over 40,000 long-term empty homes in Scotland. While not all can be returned to use quickly, many are suitable for repair and reoccupation with the right support and incentives in place.

The crackdown is part of Scotland’s broader housing strategy, which includes increasing affordable housing supply and improving the quality of existing homes. By bringing more properties back into use, officials believe they can ease pressure on housing services and help more people find secure, stable places to live.

The new approach is expected to roll out in stages, with updated guidance for councils and support for homeowners planned later this year.

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