



**Isle of Man**  
**Government**

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# Vacant Property Review

Economic Affairs

Cabinet Office

August 2019

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## **Foreword**

Across the British Isles and further afield, tackling empty homes attracts much attention as a way to solve a number of issues ranging from availability of housing for first time buyers, homelessness and in discussions about the need to develop more land.

However, before any action can be taken, knowing how many vacant properties exist can present a significant challenge, and does a vacant property mean an empty home? There are significant differences in how to define a vacant property, is it after 12 months or 24 months for insistence? Should it include holiday homes?

The 2016 Isle of Man Census was the first to state the number of vacant properties that were present on Census Night as 6,470 properties. Importantly though, the census does not collect information on why these properties were vacant, meaning that they may not be available to buy or rent. A vacant property does not necessarily equal a property available for use by a family or individual and it might not be the type of property that families and individuals want.

The census is also a snapshot in time, and three years on from the census, properties that were vacant on 24 April 2019 may no longer be so. As this report shows, over a quarter of the properties vacant on Census Night consume more than the average level of electricity, with a further 10% consuming only slightly less than average.

The data does show that the Isle of Man, like many other places, does have some properties which have been vacant for a long time, but this is a significantly smaller issue than has been suggested, amounting to 664 properties.

Monitoring the number of vacant properties continues to be a challenge outside of the census, but this report seeks to provide some additional clarity on the situation as it existed on the Island in 2016 and exists now.

I commend this review and thank officers in Economic Affairs, Cabinet Office for preparing it with the kind assistance of officers from the Manx Utilities Authority.

**Hon Chris Thomas MHK**

**Minister of Policy and Reform**

**August 2019**

## Introduction

- 1.1 This Vacant Property Review provides additional information about vacant properties to that already provided in the *2016 Isle of Man Census Report* which was laid before Tynwald in March 2017, specifically that on census night, 24/25 April 2016:

*"6,470 properties were vacant, which represents 15% of the housing stock on the Isle of Man. These properties could be vacant for a number of reasons, including second or holiday homes, properties awaiting sale and those undergoing renovation. Economic Affairs estimates that 14% of the housing stock, or 5,818 properties, were vacant in 2011."*

- 1.2 The Minister for Policy and Reform confirmed a commitment to provide additional information about vacant properties when asked in Tynwald on 16 July 2019, *"what research had been undertaken on the 15% property vacancy rate shown in the 2016 census, which equates to 6,470 empty homes?"*. This commitment involved the use of data from the Manx Utilities Authority (MUA):

*"Cabinet Office has been working with the MUA to look to see whether it is possible to identify a pattern of occupation through electricity consumption. This will help to identify whether a property has been permanently occupied since the census, remains vacant or is occupied part of the year but not at other parts of the year, because censuses always happen in April. This work was first conducted in October 2018 and is being repeated in July 2019, winter, autumn, summer, so that any patterns of occupation might be noticed."*

- 1.3 The Minister added that the information derived from electricity consumption data would be supplemented with further information "from reviewing the vacant property data set". The additional information derived from census data is where properties that were vacant on census night are located and – in broad terms - what type of properties were vacant.
- 1.4 He also stated that this information would be "published in time for consideration by the public inquiry into the Area Plan for the East". Although this review provides information about the whole of the Island, to be helpful in the case that this information is considered in the Area Plan for the East process, some specific breakdowns about the situation in the East are provided.

## Census vacant property data: definition and considerations

- 2.1 For the purposes of the census, a vacant property is defined as one which is reported by the owner as being vacant or as one for which the census enumerators could not establish occupation, after:
- correspondence chasing a census return;
  - three visits from census officers at different times of the day and week; and
  - comparison with data from the electoral role.
- 2.2 Thus a vacant property on census night is not necessarily either an empty home or an unoccupied property or one of several other types of property which are vacant according to other definitions.
- 2.3 This means that care needs to be taken when comparing the vacant property rate in the Isle of Man with that in other parts of the British Isles. The definition and measurement of property vacancy can be significantly different and this matters<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.4 In England and Wales the proportion of properties for which double rate council tax is paid because they have been empty for two years<sup>2</sup> or more can be described as a vacancy rate but this is a differently defined vacancy rate from the Isle of Man census vacancy rate. Scottish double council tax is payable on empty and unfurnished homes which have been unoccupied for more than 12 months<sup>3</sup> – differently defined again. Council tax surcharge liability definition is likely to result in a reduced number and proportion of vacant properties compared with census night vacancy rate. Jersey data is probably that which can be compared most fairly with Isle of Man data as its vacancy rate is also based upon census information, most recently in the 2011 Jersey census.
- 2.5 As defined in the census report each property could contain a household which comprises:

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk), *Dwelling stock (including vacants)* collection which brings together all documents relating to dwelling stock (including vacants) and was published 21 May 2013 and last updated 24 May 2019 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/dwelling-stock-including-vacants>. In the UK there is no statistical release specifically dedicated to vacant dwellings and data is drawn from several separate sources, each of which has its own statistical release, specifically local authority housing statistics, Council Taxbase, and the Regulator of Social Housing's Statistical data return.

<sup>2</sup> Council Tax – Empty homes premium, Department for Communities and Local Government, May 2013, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/797672/Empty\\_home\\_premium\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/797672/Empty_home_premium_guidance.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Guidance on Local Authority Discretion to reduce council tax discount on second and long term unoccupied homes and apply an increase to long-term unoccupied homes, Local Government and Communities Directorate, Scottish Government, May 2013 <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2018/04/council-tax-on-second-and-long-term-unoccupied-homes-guidance/documents/council-tax-second-long-term-unoccupied-homes-guidance-2013-pdf/council-tax-second-long-term-unoccupied-homes-guidance-2013-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/Council%2Btax%2Bon%2Bsecond%2Band%2Blong-term%2Bunoccupied%2Bhomes%2B-%2Bguidance%2B2013.pdf>

*"either one person living alone, or a group of persons (who may or may not be related) living at the same address sharing cooking facilities and who also share a living room, sitting room or dining room."*

- 2.6 One point that arises from this is that many buildings comprise several properties, each of which has its own electrical and water supply and might be occupied by a resident household. In summary a vacant property is not necessarily a vacant building or dwelling, rather it might be one of several flats or apartments in a building. In fact many vacant properties will be in buildings which include some occupied properties, some in Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs).<sup>4</sup>
- 2.7 A third consideration is that, whilst vacant property census data shows how many properties were vacant on census night, where they are, and what type of properties were vacant in broad terms, it does not show the reasons for why they were or are vacant, and the persistence of the vacancy.
- 2.8 Finding this information out is more difficult, given that no one is easily contactable to understand why a given property is vacant. For instance a visit to each property to establish whether a property was vacant on another night would require a mini-census, and thus resources; and finding out more about why a particular property is vacant would require further investigation on a case-by-case basis, again further resources. Moreover a vacant property is not necessarily a property that is available for purchase or to rent. A particular property might have been vacant on census night because it was, for instance:
- unfit for habitation;
  - under renovation;
  - lived in by someone who was admitted to hospital for a long period of time, or was resident in a nursing or care home;
  - for sale or let;
  - used as a summer or seasonal residence;
  - held as an asset;
  - forms part of a deceased person's estate;
  - is a business premise or is a short-let serviced apartment which has not been excluded from the residential list<sup>5</sup>.
- 2.9 Therefore this review looks to provide as much additional information as possible about the type, location and persistence of vacancy of properties using census data and other data sets, in particular electricity consumption as used in Guernsey for instance. Are

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<sup>4</sup> The process of continuing to initially register HMOs is continuing which will provide more information about these properties. Probably even more interestingly for the purposes of understanding more about vacant properties and empty houses, the first Buildings Condition Survey in the Isle of Man for a decade is underway. This is probably half-way through its expected two year life. Further information about which buildings are empty, dilapidated, ruinous etc. should be available next year, and perhaps earlier based on provisional and partial sampling and analysis.

<sup>5</sup> For instance, and although every property database entry is assigned a property type, which allowed commercial and other non-residential property to be removed from the database, nearly 20% of a not necessarily random group of properties in the East which were unoccupied for electoral registration purposes recently were unoccupied because they were used either for business or were let short term as a serviced apartment.

census night vacant properties vacant at other times, or are they subsequently occupied?

## Isle of Man Vacant Property Data

- 3.1 The 2016 census report was the first one which explicitly stated the number of vacant properties on census night.
- 3.2 This data can be compared to some extent with data in both the 2001 and 2011 censuses, particularly the 2001 census from which more detailed data has been retained which allows analysis by area and type of property.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.3 Table 1 below shows the vacancy rate and the number of properties that equates to, from censuses where data is available.

**Table 1 Isle of Man Vacancy Rate per Isle of Man Census**

	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2016</b>
Vacancy Rate	8%	14%	15%
Number of properties	2,886	5,818	6,470

As the table shows, the vacancy rate in 2016 was similar to that in 2011 and nearly twice that in 2001.

### Vacancy Rates by Area

- 3.4 Detailed information about the number of vacant properties on the Island is available from the 2001 and 2016 censuses, which can be used to calculate area specific vacancy rates.
- 3.5 Douglas has the highest number of vacant properties in both 2001 and 2016, although it does not have the highest vacancy rate. In 2001 Bride had the highest vacancy rate of 16%, whilst in 2016, Rushen had the highest rate at 21%. Tables 2 and 3 show the number of vacant properties and vacancy rates by area, based on the census districts.

**Table 2 Vacancy rates by District, 2001 Census**

<b>Census District</b>	<b>Vacant</b>	<b>Occupied</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Vacancy Rate</b>
Douglas	972	10,332	11,304	9%
Ramsey	351	3,281	3,632	10%
Peel	143	1,522	1,665	9%
Castletown	156	1,284	1,440	11%
Port Erin	96	1,478	1,574	6%
Port St Mary	107	803	910	12%
Laxey	66	715	781	8%
Onchan	207	3,680	3,887	5%
Andreas	49	481	530	9%
Arbory	50	730	780	6%

<sup>6</sup> The 2006 and 2011 censuses did capture whether a property was vacant for the operational purposes of the census, however this data was not then kept permanently.



<b>Census District</b>	<b>Vacant</b>	<b>Occupied</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Vacancy Rate</b>
Ballaugh	38	387	425	9%
Braddan	83	1,000	1,083	8%
Bride	32	170	202	16%
German	24	407	431	6%
Jurby	21	243	264	8%
Lezayre	48	471	519	9%
Lonan	64	556	620	10%
Malew	88	914	1,002	9%
Marown	48	744	792	6%
Maughold	44	383	427	10%
Michael	56	556	612	9%
Patrick	54	516	570	9%
Rushen	60	630	690	9%
Santon	29	238	267	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,886</b>	<b>31,521</b>	<b>34,407</b>	<b>8%</b>

**Table 3 Vacancy rates by District, 2016 Census**

<b>Census District</b>	<b>Vacant</b>	<b>Occupied</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Vacancy Rate</b>
Douglas	2,430	11,592	14,022	17%
Ramsey	727	3,598	4,325	17%
Peel	394	2,295	2,689	15%
Castletown	365	1,434	1,799	20%
Port Erin	357	1,611	1,968	18%
Port St Mary	190	881	1,071	18%
Laxey	130	715	845	15%
Onchan	438	3,974	4,412	10%
Andreas	83	595	678	12%
Arbory	119	805	924	13%
Ballaugh	43	442	485	9%
Braddan	183	1,346	1,529	12%
Bride	17	181	198	9%
German	73	417	490	15%
Jurby	28	273	301	9%
Lezayre	67	510	577	12%
Lonan	76	644	720	11%
Malew	160	959	1,119	14%
Marown	103	863	966	11%
Maughold	67	406	473	14%
Michael	91	659	750	12%
Patrick	113	611	724	16%
Rushen	168	651	819	21%
Santon	48	301	349	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,470</b>	<b>35,763</b>	<b>42,233</b>	<b>15%</b>

3.6 With the exception of Bride, all areas across the Island have seen the number of vacant properties increase between 2001 and 2016.

3.7 Specific information about the Area Plan for the East property vacancy rates is provided in Table 4, including by the census districts within the overall area.

**Table 4 Vacancy Rates for Area Plan for the East**

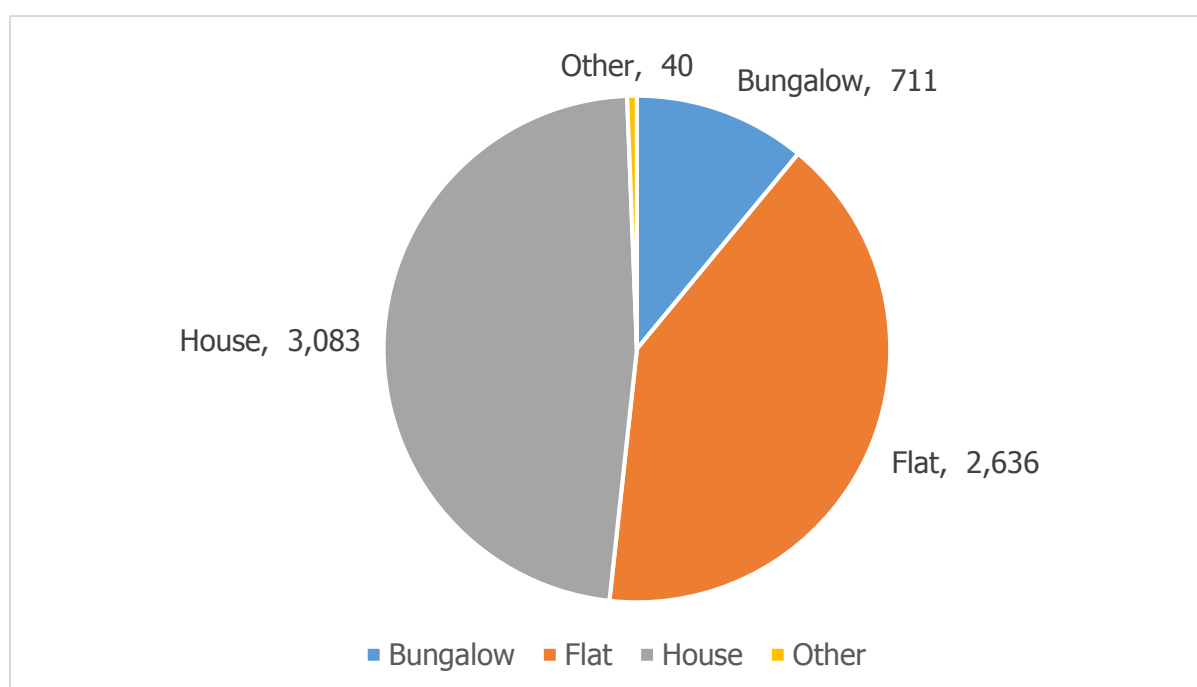
	<b>2001</b>	<b>Vacancy Rate</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>Vacancy Rate</b>
Braddan	83	8%	183	12%
Douglas	972	9%	2,430	17%
Laxey	66	8%	130	15%
Lonan	64	10%	76	11%
Marown	48	6%	103	11%
Onchan	207	5%	438	10%
Santon	29	11%	48	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,469</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>3,408</b>	<b>16%</b>

### Vacant properties by property type

3.8 The Isle of Man Government has a central database of all properties on the Island, known as the Property Gazetteer. The Property Gazetteer includes a brief description of property, such as house, bungalow or flat which can help to provide further information about the kinds of properties that are vacant on the Island. The information does not include the number of bedrooms or rooms, or the state or occupation of the property.

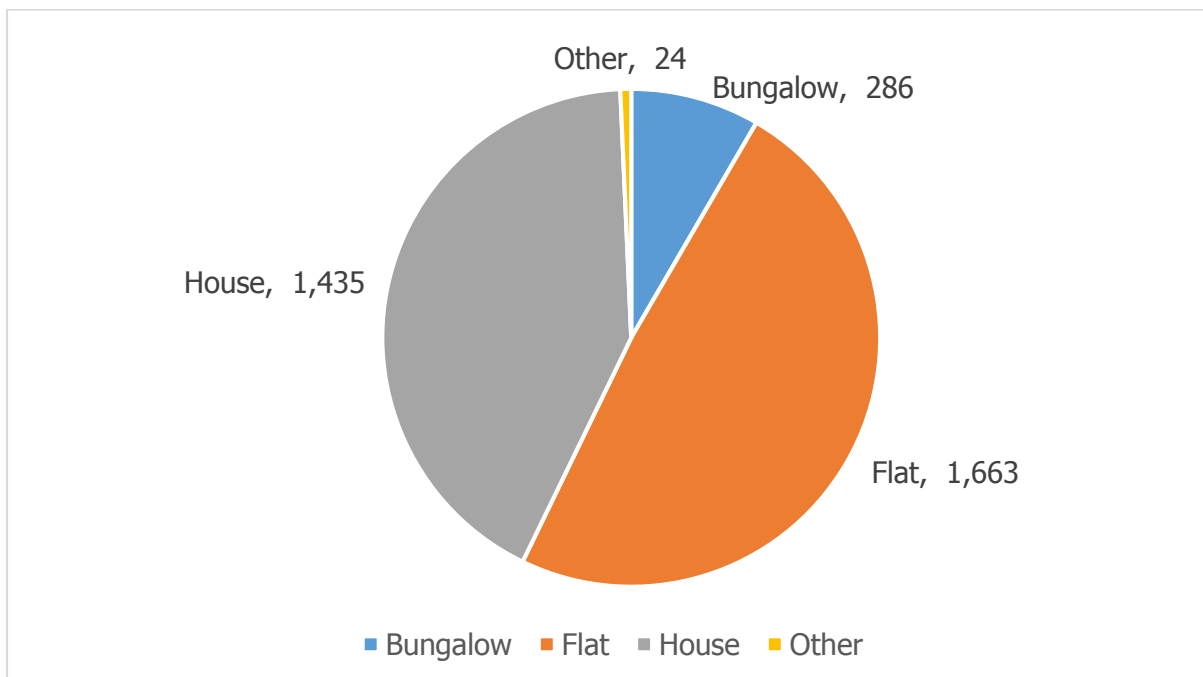
3.9 In the whole Island, houses are the most common type of vacant property, accounting for 48% of all vacant properties as shown in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1 Vacant properties by property type, Island wide, 2016 Census**



- 3.10 However, there are significant differences in terms of the type of properties that are vacant inside and outside the towns, particularly in the rural areas. For instance in Douglas and Ramsey, flats and apartments comprise the majority of vacant properties, at 60% in each area; whereas in the more rural areas, outside the towns, houses make up a significant majority of vacant properties; whilst in the villages and smaller towns, the distribution of properties is more even across the three main property types. Appendix One includes a breakdown of each area’s vacant properties by type.
- 3.11 Within the TAPE plan area, flats and apartments in Douglas are the most common type of vacant property, followed by houses and then bungalows. Figure 2 shows the TAPE vacant properties by property type.
- 3.12 In terms of the spatial distribution of vacant properties, vacant flats are more clustered together, with several flats in a block or on a road being vacant, whereas houses and bungalows are more dispersed and are not as often located next to or as close by to another vacant property.
- 3.13 For example, within Douglas, if there is a vacant flat in a postcode, then there is on average 4 other vacant flats and apartments in the same postcode, whilst where there is a vacant house, there is only 1 other vacant house. For bungalows, there is, on average, only 1 vacant bungalow in a postcode.

**Figure 2 TAPE Vacant properties by type, 2016 Census**



## Vacancy using electricity consumption data

- 4.1 As the census is a snapshot of the Island on a given date, whereas population movements - both due to migration to or from the Island, and within the Island - happen continuously, another source of data is needed to understand the persistence of vacancy in a property or even whether the vacancy was just around census night in the spring but not at other times of the year.
- 4.2 Data regarding property electricity consumption available from the Manx Utilities Authority (MUA) can be and has been used to identify how many properties have been continuously vacant since the census, but also how many might have been occupied for part of that time. It also provides an indication of how many properties might not be suitable for occupation as they may not have an electricity meter attached.
- 4.3 According to the MUA, the average annual consumption for a property on the Isle of Man is 3,200 kilowatt-hours (kWh), although it is possible for those being highly energy aware to only consume 1,460 kWh per year. On a monthly basis, average consumption equates to 266kWh per month, or 122 units for those being highly energy aware.
- 4.4 Two data extracts have been obtained from the MUA, one for the period 1 April 2017 to 30 September 2018, and a second from 1 October 2018 through to 30 June 2019. The MUA matched the unique property reference number (UPRN) used in the census to the data within its systems<sup>7</sup>. As two data extracts have been taken, it is possible to estimate the level of long term vacancy on the Island.
- 4.5 Further investigation is being undertaken on how electricity consumption has varied for properties that were occupied on census night, which should provide an indicator of whether occupied properties have since become unoccupied.

### Long Term Vacant Properties

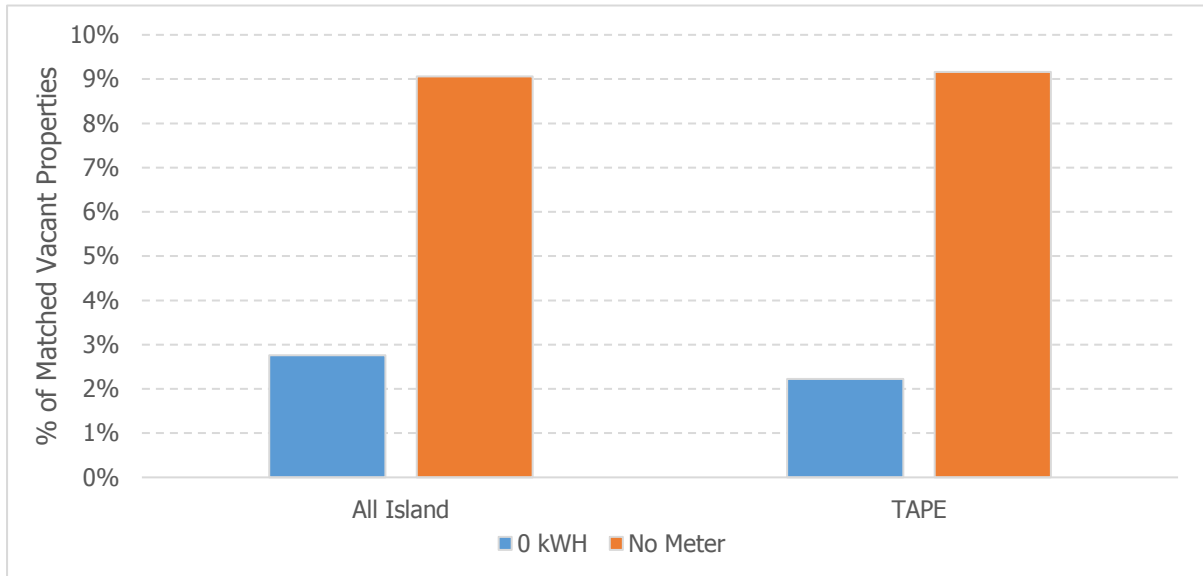
- 4.6 664 properties for the whole Island, and 338 properties in the TAPE area, have had no electricity consumption over the whole period, or have not had a meter installed.
- 4.7 As shown in Figure 3, by property type, for the whole Island, 328 of the properties where houses (49%), 299 were flats (45%) and 36 (5%) were bungalows that could be considered as long term vacant.

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<sup>7</sup> It was not possible in all cases to obtain matched data between the census vacant properties and then MUA database, with 831 properties (12%) not being matched. These properties have been excluded from the analysis so the following analysis applies to 5,639 properties across the Island which were vacant on census night in 2016 and 1,041 vacant properties in the TAPE area. These properties could not be matched due the reference number within the MUA system that the consumption record was linked to was different to that of the property gazetteer number.

4.8 In the TAPE areas, long term vacancy follows the same trend as vacancy in general, with flats being the most common long term vacant property at 172 properties (51%), 156 houses (46%) and 9 bungalows (3%).

**Figure 3 Long Term Vacant Properties**

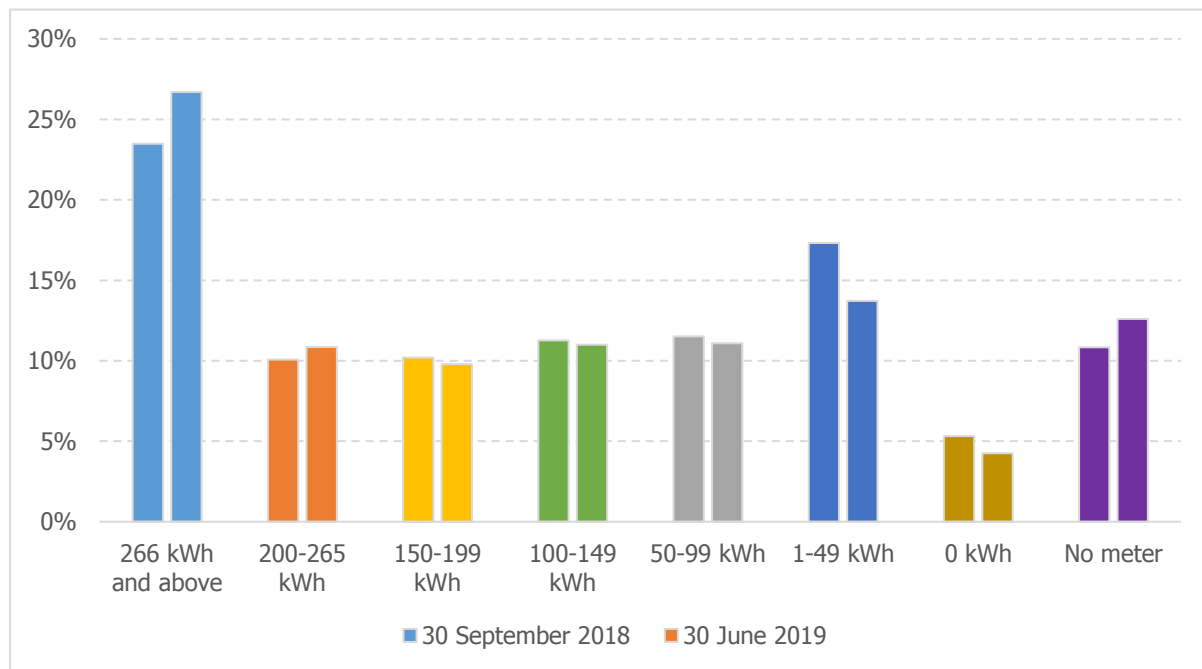


4.9 Thus using long term vacancy as defined by no electricity consumption during the last two years, the long term vacancy rate for properties is 1.6% of the Island's housing stock.

### **Occupation since census night**

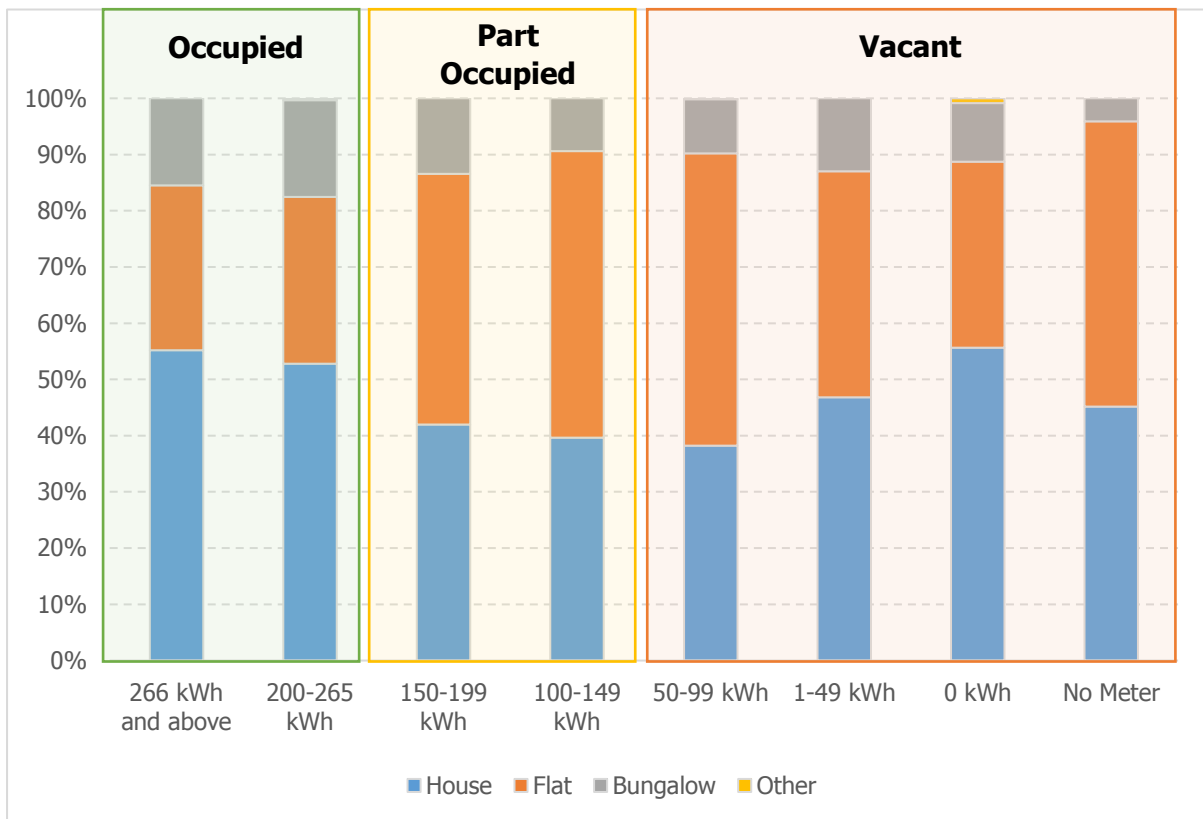
4.10 As mentioned earlier, the data from the census is a snapshot of the Island on a set date, whereas occupation of properties will change regularly. The electricity consumption data has been broken into segments based upon the average monthly consumption of properties since that date, to suggest whether the properties are or have been occupied since April 2016 and this is shown in figure 4 below.

**Figure 4 Electricity consumption of vacant properties, All Island**



- 4.11 As Figure 4 shows, at 30 June 2019, 27% of the vacant properties per the 2016 census had a monthly consumption either equal or greater than the monthly average of 266kWh, which suggests that 1,505 properties have become permanently occupied since census night.
- 4.12 A further 11%, or 620 properties, have an average monthly consumption of 200-265kWh. Whilst it is below the average consumption, it is still likely that most of these properties are now occupied, particularly flats and bungalows which make up a third of this group.
- 4.13 The properties in the 150-199kWh and 100-149kWh groups, which represents 1,184 properties (21%), could potentially be permanently occupied by those who are highly energy aware (either through choice or financial situation); however it is more likely that most of these properties have been occupied at some point since the 2016 census, but not for the whole time. This group of properties is likely to contain a number of seasonally occupied properties.
- 4.14 Under this level, properties are unlikely to have been occupied for any significant length of time, for those in the 1-49kWh and 50-99kWh brackets, or at all for those in the 0 or no meter categories. This amounts to 2,368 properties, or 42% of the matched properties. If this equates to the number of vacant properties currently on Island, then the vacancy rate by this definition would be 5.6%.

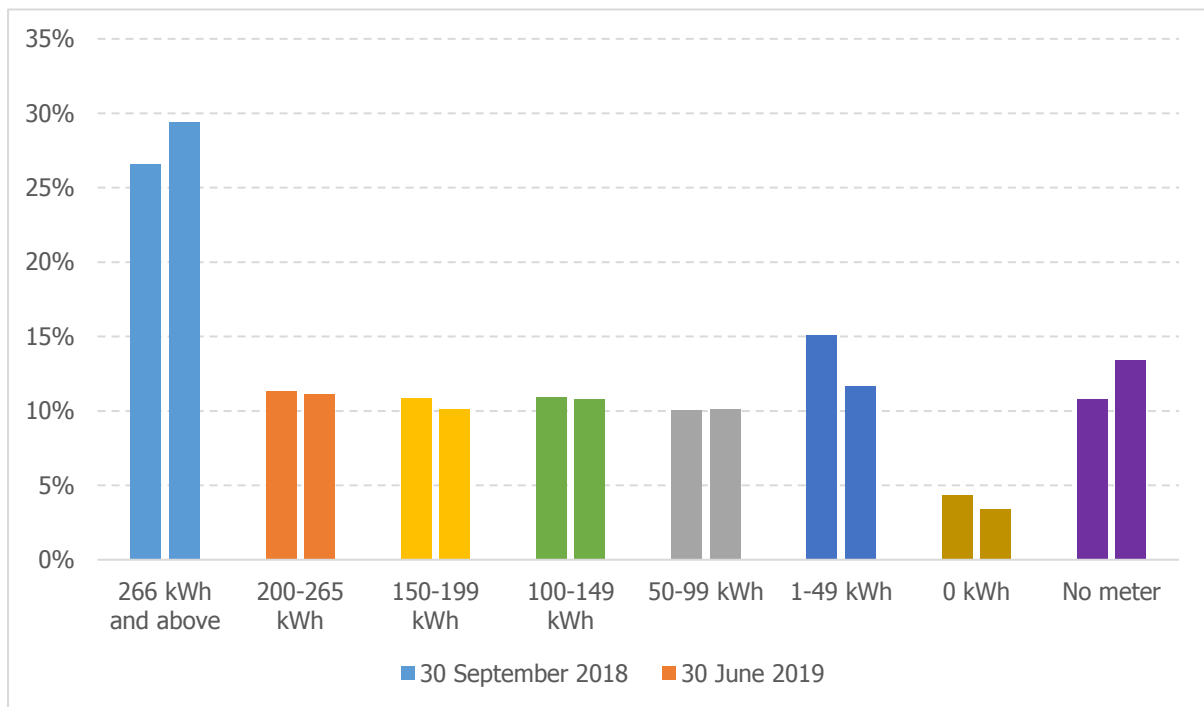
**Figure 5 Electricity consumption by property type, All Island**



4.15 As Figure 5 shows, houses have been the largest property type that have become occupied since the 2016 census, whilst flats are most likely to have been occupied some of the time but not all. For properties that are likely to have been vacant most, if not all, of the time, the distribution between flats and houses is similar, at 45% being houses and 46% being flats.

4.16 For TAPE area properties (see figures 6 and 7), the number of properties that could be considered as occupied since the 2016 census is slightly greater than that of the Island as a whole. As Figure 6 shows, by 30 June 2019, just under 30% of properties have average or above electricity consumption, with a further 11% using just under the average consumption.

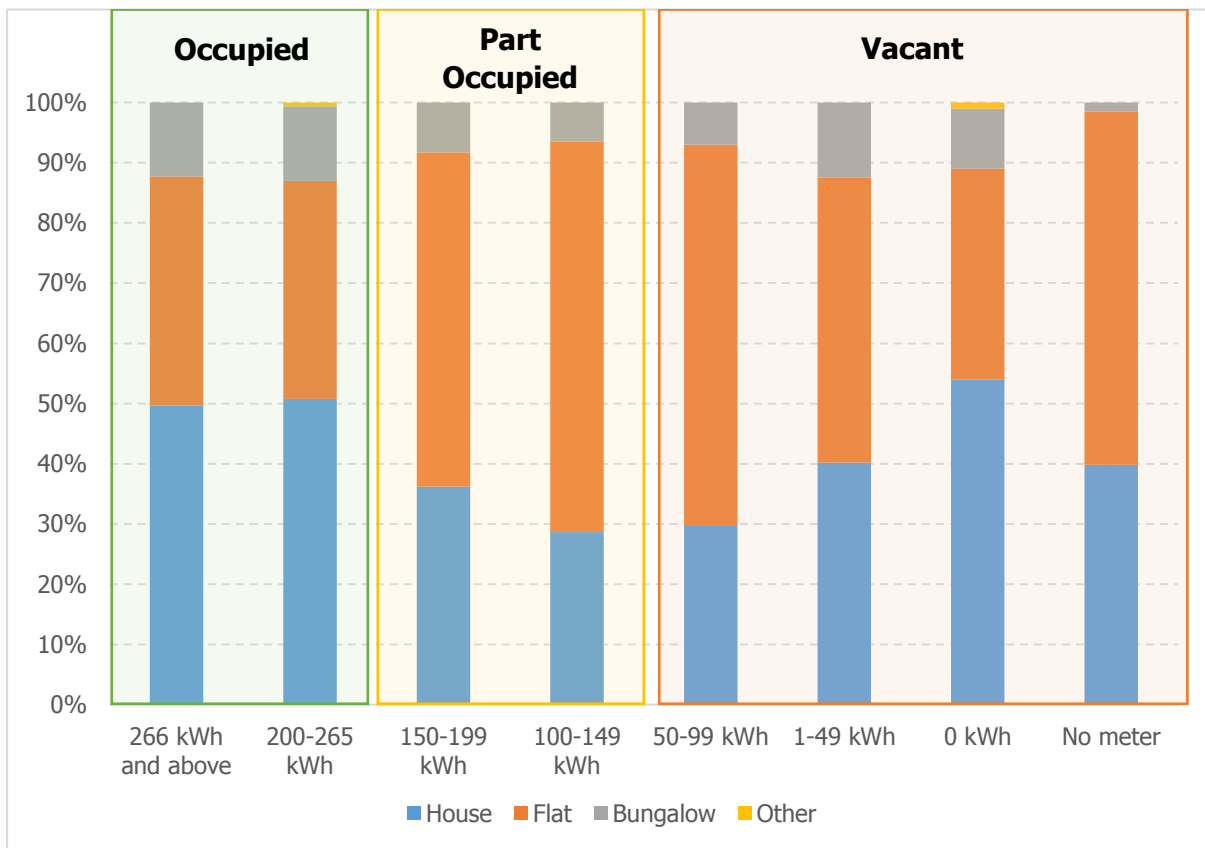
**Figure 6 Electricity consumption of vacant properties, TAPE**



- 4.17 Otherwise the TAPE areas generally mirror that of the rest of the Island for properties that have been partly occupied during the period, or have had very low or no occupation during that time. Using the same basis of assessment for the whole Island of any property that has less than 99kWh of consumption, could be considered as still being vacant. This would give a vacancy rate for the TAPE areas of 5%.
- 4.18 As with the Island as a whole, the most common property type that has become occupied since the census is houses, although to a lesser extent, with flats making up 38% of occupied properties compared with 29% across the Island as a whole. However flats make up a much larger proportion of the properties that could be considered as having been part occupied for some of the time, and are much more likely to still be considered vacant, accounting for 54% of all properties with less than 100kWh consumption or no meter.



**Figure 7 Electricity consumption by property type, TAPE**



### Appendix One - Vacant properties by type and district, 2016 Census

	<b>Andreas</b>	<b>Arbory</b>	<b>Ballaugh</b>	<b>Braddan</b>	<b>Bride</b>	<b>Castletown</b>	<b>Douglas</b>	<b>German</b>	<b>Jurby</b>	<b>Laxey</b>	<b>Lezayre</b>	<b>Lonan</b>
Bungalow	21	33	5	13	3	26	78	6	1	18	15	21
Flat	5	-	4	48	1	134	1,514	7	-	18	1	-
House	57	85	33	115	13	205	829	57	27	92	51	55
Other	-	1	1	7	-	-	9	3	-	2	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>2,430</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>76</b>
	<b>Malew</b>	<b>Marown</b>	<b>Maughold</b>	<b>Michael</b>	<b>Onchan</b>	<b>Patrick</b>	<b>Peel</b>	<b>Port Erin</b>	<b>Port St Mary</b>	<b>Ramsey</b>	<b>Rushen</b>	<b>Santon</b>
Bungalow	24	22	23	26	127	16	24	63	17	101	21	7
Flat	15	15	4	3	140	6	154	140	74	449	2	3
House	119	65	39	60	169	89	216	152	99	176	144	35
Other	2	1	1	2	2	2	-	2	-	1	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>357</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>727</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>48</b>



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