

Debate Pack

15 December 2023

CDP-0229 (2023)

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Adequacy of service accommodation

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1 Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the adequacy of service accommodation is scheduled to take place on Tuesday 19 December, from 2:30-4:00pm. The debate will be opened by Alistair Strathern MP.

2 Background

The maintenance and repair of service family accommodation has long been an issue for armed forces personnel.

In 2016 the Public Accounts Committee said service families “have been badly let down for many years” and are not getting the accommodation service they “have a right to expect”.¹

In the Defence Accommodation Strategy, published in October 2022, the Ministry of Defence committed to ensuring personnel can access accommodation that is “[of good quality and in line with modern living standards](#).”²

However, the performance of the new contractors who took over responsibility for maintaining and repairing service family accommodation in 2022 was described as “unacceptable” by Ministers in December 2022, amid reports of loss of hot water, heating, mould and a backlog of cases.³

In the 2023 [Defence Command Paper refresh](#), the Government described the provision of service accommodation as “essential for the operational effectiveness of the Armed Forces” and pledged a £400 million investment over the next two years.

In November 2023 the Minister for Defence Procurement made a written statement laying out preparation plans for maintenance and repairs for winter 2023.

The Defence Committee [launched an inquiry into Service Accommodation](#) in July 2023. The inquiry is chaired by Robert Courts MP.

Service accommodation is divided into service family accommodation (SFA) and single living accommodation (SLA).

¹ Public Accounts Committee, [Service Family Accommodation](#), HC 77 2016-17, 13 July 2016, para 1

² Ministry of Defence, [Defence Accommodation Strategy](#), CP 733, 20 October 2022

³ [HC Deb 20 December 2022 c143-153](#)

2.1 Decline in satisfaction with service accommodation

Satisfaction with accommodation has “fallen markedly” in the last year.⁴ Fewer than half of personnel are satisfied with the overall standard of accommodation, according to the Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey (AFCAS) 2023. Published in June 2023, the survey found only 19% of respondents were satisfied with responses to, and the quality of, maintenance and repair requests. Satisfaction with the responses to, and quality of maintenance/ repair work of service family accommodation has fallen 13 and eight percentage points respectively since 2022. Levels of satisfaction with responses to, and quality of maintenance/repair work for single living accommodation are 27% and 29%, respectively.⁵

Poor accommodation may also be affecting retention. Over a quarter of respondents (29%) identified accommodation provision as a factor influencing intentions to leave (for comparison, the top factor, cited by 63%, was the impact of Service life on family/personal life).

The survey was conducted between September 2022 and February 2023. The AFCAS report says the timing of the survey, which coincided with significant complaints about service, may have had some impact on the results.

2.2 New contractors in 2022

Responsibility for maintaining and repairing service family accommodation has long been contracted out to specialist providers.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) is responsible for the defence estate. This includes allocating service family accommodation (SFA) and procuring and managing routine maintenance and repair.⁶

In 2021 the DIO replaced the previous Next Generation Estates Programme contracts with new Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) contracts. The DIO said these were designed to be “very different” from the previous, much criticised contracts, with incentives for suppliers to reduce disruption for families.

Under the new FDIS contracts, Pinnacle Group manages the overarching national accommodation management services contract. It acts as a single point of contact for accommodation issues for personnel. Two other

⁴ Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitudes survey 2023](#), 1 June 2023

⁵ Ministry of Defence, [Armed forces continuous attitudes survey 2023](#), 1 June 2023

⁶ Gov.uk, [DIO: About us](#), accessed 24 January 2023

companies, Amey and VIVO, are responsible for carrying out repairs and maintaining properties.

Complaints about maintenance and repairs under the new contracts

Complaints about the service provided by the new contractors began to emerge in the latter half of 2022. Service families reported issues with response times, missed appointments and lengthy delays to resolve loss of heating and hot water.

[MPs raised concerns with Ministers](#) in Parliament, including in an Urgent Question in December 2022. Alex Chalk, the then Minister for Defence Procurement, said the performance of the new contractors was “unacceptable.”⁷ The Shadow Defence Secretary, John Healey, described issues with mould and lengthy waits for repairs as a “straight-up scandal”.⁸

Senior staff from Pinnacle, Amey and Vivo, in [evidence to the Defence Committee](#) on 27 November 2023, said understaffing contributed to the issues experienced last winter. Craig McGilvray, of Amey, said the service delivered at the beginning of the contract “was entirely unacceptable”.⁹

More information about the types and standard of accommodation, and maintenances issues during winter 2022/23, can be found in Commons Library briefing [Armed forces family housing: Maintenance issues](#) (CBP9716), published in February 2023.

2.3

Funding improvements to service accommodation

The Defence Command Paper refresh, published in July 2023, pledged a £400 million investment in accommodation over the next two years.¹⁰ This is split into £220 million for financial year 2023-24 and £180 million for 2024-25.¹¹

⁷ [HC Deb 20 December 2022 c143-153](#)

⁸ Forces News, [Service family accommodation problems are a ‘straight-up scandal’](#), Labour says, 15 December 2022

⁹ Defence Committee, [Oral evidence: Service accommodation](#), 27 November 2023, HC 55 2023-24

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Defence Command Paper 2023: Defence’s response to a more contested world](#), CP 901, 18 July 2023

¹¹ PQ 2481 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 23 November 2023

The £220 million for financial year 2023-24 was received in July 2023. As of 20 November, £38 million had been spent and works completed. A further £151 million has been allocated, with the remainder subject to financial approval.¹²

2.4

Planning for winter 2023/24

On 6 November 2023 James Cartlidge, the Minister for Defence Procurement, made a [written statement on the MOD's plan for winter 2023](#). Mr Cartlidge said that “lessons were learned and action is being taken” after the poor experience of last winter.¹³

The Minister said that funding for maintenance and improvements has doubled from £160 million to around £380 million for the current financial year. Some of this money will be spent on treating and preventing damp and mould.¹⁴

Damp and mould mitigation packages, involving increasing insulation, upgrading extractor fans and resealing windows and doors, will be in place for around 4,000 families. Further work on thermal upgrades (including new doors, windows and external wall insulation) will be funded. Boiler and heating upgrades for around 1,500 homes will also be funded during the current financial year.¹⁵

Further steps taken in preparation for winter are laid out in the written statement, which can be found in this debate pack.

The MOD has provided further information in response on the current situation with accommodation in response to written questions.

As of 1 December 2023:

- 20,800 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties have reported maintenance issues related to heating since April 2022.¹⁶
- 6,945 SFA properties have reported maintenance issues relating to hot water since April 2022.¹⁷
- 1,617 issues have been reported relating to heating and 1,685 issues relating to hot water in single living accommodation since April 2022.¹⁸

¹² PQ 2481 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 23 November 2023

¹³ HCSW28 [[Service Family Accommodation and winter planning](#)], 13 November 2023

¹⁴ HCSW28 [[Service Family Accommodation and winter planning](#)], 13 November 2023

¹⁵ HCSW28 [[Service Family Accommodation and winter planning](#)], 13 November 2023

¹⁶ PQ 4749 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 6 December 2023

¹⁷ PQ 4749 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 6 December 2023

¹⁸ PQ 4749 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 6 December 2023

- 1,359 Service Family Accommodation received a damp and mould treatment package, between 1 April 2022 to 1 December 2023¹⁹
- The number of calls to Pinnacle National Service Centre reporting damp and/or mould peaked in March 2023, when 1,789 calls were made. 550 calls were made on this issue in November 2023 (see table 1).²⁰
- 1,114 families living in service family accommodation were required to move out of their homes due to maintenance issues, in the period 1 April 2022 to 1 December 2023²¹
- 15 families who live in SFA are living in temporary hotel accommodation as a result of maintenance issues in their home, as at 30 November 2023.²²

Table 1 Calls reporting damp and/or mould in 2022 and 2023 (selected months)

Month	Number of calls reporting damp and/or mould to the Pinnacle National Service Centre
2022	
October	331
November	720
December	847
2023	
January	904
February	971
March	1,789
April	1,118
May	845
October 2023	351
November 2023	550

Source: 2022 data taken from PQ 5583 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 12 December 2023; 2023 data taken from PQ 4547 [[Armed Forces Housing](#)], 5 December 2023

¹⁹ PQ5240 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 13 December 2023

²⁰ PQ 4547 [[Armed Forces Housing](#)], 5 December 2023. Figures for call numbers in 2022 are provided in PQ 5583 [[Armed Forces: Housing](#)], 12 December 2023

²¹ PQ 4747 [[Armed Forces Housing](#)], 6 December 2023

²² PQ 4746 [[Armed Forces Housing](#)], 6 December 2023

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Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[One in three service personnel living in lowest grade service accommodation, Labour reveals](#)

Forces Net
15 December 2023

[State of military housing was far worse than anticipated, contractor tells MPs](#)

Forces Net
Tom Sables
28 November 2023

[Armed forces personnel living in 'rat-infested' accommodation, Commons hears](#)

Independent
Ben Hatton
20 November 2023

[Defence Secretary Agrees To Let Serving Personnel Give Evidence On Poor Housing](#)

Politics Home
Tom Scotson
25 October 2023

[Improving military housing is a priority, Defence Secretary says](#)

Forces Net
Tom Sables and James Knuckey
29 September 2023

[What is being done to fix problems with military accommodation?](#)

Forces Net
Claire Sadler
25 September 2023

[Defence Command Paper: How the £400m will be invested in service family accommodation](#)

Forces Net
21 July 2023

Ministers accused of leaving military personnel in homes with 'broken boilers, leaking roofs and black mould' after official figures reveal 230,000 call-outs for repairs and maintenance last year - an average of six per building

Daily Mail
David Wilcock
29 June 2023

UK government wins right to take back control of military homes worth £8bn

The Guardian
Jasper Jolly
15 May 2023

Military families given shop vouchers as compensation for unsafe or substandard homes

Daily Telegraph
Danielle Sheridan
28 April 2023

Contractors miss 14,500 urgent military home maintenance appointments in eight months

Daily Telegraph
Will Hazell
14 January 2022

Military housing: Families say they're living in damp, mouldy conditions

BBC News Online
Jonathan Beale
14 December 2022

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Press releases

Upgrades to thousands of military houses as winter response teams bolstered

Ministry of Defence

14 November 2023

Service families will see thousands of military homes modernised, with preparation work already underway, and repair staffing bolstered ahead of the winter period.

A £400 million investment over the next two years was prioritised for accommodation in the Defence Command Paper Refresh to ensure good quality accommodation is provided to Service Personnel and their families. The work to modernise thousands of homes is underway, from kitchen and bathroom refits to new doors, windows and roofs to improve thermal efficiency.

In addition, this winter, contractor repair teams at Amey and VIVO and call centre staffing at Pinnacle has increased to respond to anticipated seasonal demand for maintenance to Service Family Accommodation.

The £400 million investment into military homes over the next two years will deliver:

- Kitchen and/or bathroom refits in more than 1,000 homes;
- Boiler and heating upgrades for around 1,500 properties;
- More than 4,500 damp and mould remediation packages;
- Major work for more than 4,000 other properties to improve thermal efficiency, to prevent damp and mould and reduce the cost of living for service families. These works will include new doors, windows, roofs and the installation of external wall insulation; and
- Extensive, high-quality refurbishments of around 1,000 currently unused homes to increase the number of modern homes available to Service families.

Defence Secretary, Grant Shapps said:

Our Armed Forces go above and beyond to serve and keep us safe, so it's imperative they live in good quality accommodation – often that is not the case.

I will not stand by and let this continue. This funding is just the beginning and military accommodation will always be a top priority.

By investing in our estate, we are investing in our people, ensuring they have modernised properties, and fast and effective help when issues arise, to reflect the selfless dedication they provide to us as a nation.

Responses to housing issues last winter were completely unacceptable and action was taken to withhold payments from our accommodation contractors to the fullest extent possible. Substantial progress has been made to improve performance since then and we are approaching this winter with a dramatically lower number of open complaints and overdue works.

The MOD has been working with contractors to further develop severe weather contingency plans to cope with severe weather events, and to ensure services can deliver and recover quickly to minimise disruption to families.

Defence Infrastructure Organisation Chief Executive, Mike Green said:

We want to ensure that military families have the quality of accommodation that they expect and rightly deserve, and through the £400 million investment we will continue our work to modernise and improve homes for thousands of families.

The service that many families experienced last winter was just not good enough and we have worked closely with our contractors to put plans in place to help us respond to the challenges that the colder months bring.

To ensure the right resources are in the right place at the right time as winter progresses, DIO and our contractors' winter planning activities include:

- Pinnacle call handling capacity increased by 55%.
- Amey resources increased by 40%.
- VIVO has additional out-of-hours staff for urgent repairs and have created a Customer Experience team to better manage contact with families regarding issues and appointments.
- Better availability of parts, including temporary heaters which are distributed nationwide.
- Agile resource allocation processes during the coldest months.

Military accommodation will continue to receive investment over the next decade to ensure the upkeep and maintenance of the defence estate.

To talk openly about accommodation issues being faced, and to help solve the problems long-term, Service Personnel and both current and former, were invited to share their experiences with the House of Commons Defence Select Committee.

[Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service families, Defence Accommodation Strategy speech](#)

Ministry of Defence

20 October 2022

Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families, Sarah Atherton spoke in Windsor to launch the Defence Accommodation Strategy:

I might not have been a defence minister for very long, but having been a soldier in the Army Intelligence Corps and an Army wife, I know how important decent accommodation is.

It's not just about making sure the shower works, the roof doesn't leak, and the kitchen is mould-free, as important as those things are.

It's about having somewhere that you can look forward to returning to, somewhere you, your partner and your family can call home. In other words, somewhere that doesn't make you want to ditch the military life in favour of a less exciting but more predictable civilian one.

Your home should incentivise you to pursue a long, rewarding military career, alongside your family. Home is where the heart is – as cliché as it sounds – so we shouldn't be surprised if people don't want to live in below par accommodation.

Thankfully the Defence Secretary, who (to be honest, quite a while ago) lived in these barracks, is determined to get this right. So we talked to service personnel and families. We listened to what they had to say and today I am delighted to launch Defence's new Accommodation Strategy.

Our plan focuses on three areas:

Firstly, it's about raising the bar: setting a new minimum standard for Single Living Accommodation across the entire Defence estate.

As a bare minimum we will ensure every room is quiet, secure, dry, well ventilated and heated with access to hot water on demand. That is a minimum. And there'll be a proactive approach to ongoing maintenance, regularly checking to make sure things don't go wrong in the first place, with regular upgrades.

I know things have moved on since I was a military wife, so we'll also be ensuring stronger Wi-Fi connections for all. Which is great news for those who want to video call home or stream online.

And in the coming months and years, we'll keep talking to our personnel, and their families, to understand how their needs change, and what more can be done.

Secondly, our plan is about fairness.

In the past, subsidised accommodation was divvied-up according to rank. From now on we're going to ensure it is allocated primarily based on need.

The question we'll be asking is not how many stripes or pips they have, or how many people they command, but do they have a family? How old are their children? Do they have any special requirements?

Service families' accommodation will be allocated on individual requirements, not rank. We're also going to make sure our strategy better reflects the reality of today's society. That means giving personnel in long-term relationships the same access to accommodation as their married colleagues.

Finally, this plan is about value for money.

We're dealing with the rising cost of living, and a war in Europe, so we've got to get smarter about getting more for our money. This means reducing the current stock in places where beds are continually unused and going empty. It means making our homes more sustainable by increasing their energy efficiency, through better insulation and modern heating systems. And it means future-proofing renovated accommodation with things like electric car charging ports.

It's no coincidence that we chose these barracks to launch our new Accommodation Strategy today. When Queen Victoria visited, it was in such a state of disrepair, she ordered a complete renovation.

Now we're ensuring that in today's Armed Forces, wherever our people live, they will have a place they are proud to call home. Ensuring they are incentivised to do their job to the best of their abilities.

After all, we expect our brave men and women to protect our backs; and the least we can do is show them that we have theirs.

5

PQs

Armed Forces: Housing

13 Dec 2023 | 5240

Asked by: Maria Eagle

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many military housing units were treated for (a) mould, (b) heating and (c) external wall insulation problems in each year since 2019.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

Out of a total of c47,900 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties, in the period 1 April 2022 to 1 December 2023:

- 1,359 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) have received a damp and mould treatment package.
- Figures not available for damp or mould only.

There have been 20,800 reports of maintenance issues relating to heating in SFA properties. There are currently 1,020 live issues ranging from minor issues such as faulty radiator valves to total loss of heating (where temporary heating or alternative accommodation is provided).

Data prior to the start of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services Accommodation contracts in April 2022 is not held centrally and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The table below shows the number of SFA that have had external wall insulation installed in each complete financial year since 2019:

Financial Year No of SFA

2022-23	900
2021-22	1,250
2020-21	800
2019-20	950

Armed Forces: Housing

13 Dec 2023 | 5238

Asked by: Maria Eagle

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many military housing units are scheduled for (a) renovation and (b) replacement.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

The Department has instructed improvement works to c4,000 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) this Financial Year (FY). This includes external wall insulation, door, window and roof replacements, heating upgrades, new kitchens and bathrooms, and extensive refurbishment of c1,000 long-term void SFA. This is in addition to work to treat damp and mould in c4,000 SFA.

In FY 2022-23, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) purchased 310 properties to replace SFA that has either reached its predicted life expectancy and requires significant investment to meet future sustainability targets; or has been re-located to support military unit moves where the SFA in the previous location is being disposed of.

Armed Forces: Housing

06 Dec 2023 | 4749

Asked by: Luke Pollard

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, for how many (a) service family accommodation and (b) single living accommodation homes have issues with (i) heating and (ii) hot water been reported since April 2022.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

As at 1 December 2023 there are:

- 20,800 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties have reported maintenance issues related to heating since April 2022. These work orders include all repairs associated with heating such as condensate pipes freezing in extremely cold weather or a faulty single radiator valve and are not limited to a total loss of heating.
- 6,945 SFA properties have reported maintenance issues relating to hot water since April 2022. Work orders include all repairs associated with hot water and are not limited to total hot water loss.

For those sites managed under the Built Estate Contracts for Single Living Accommodation (SLA), there have been 1,617 issues reported relating to heating and 1,685 issues reported relating to hot water since April 2022.

This data includes heating and hot water issues that also affect common rooms, circulation spaces, kitchens etc. Issues could relate to singular rooms, or a single tap, and is not limited to total loss of heating and/or hot water for an entire SLA asset. It is not possible to provide data for sites managed under other arrangements.

Armed Forces: Housing

05 Dec 2023 | 4545

Asked by: Luke Pollard

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to the Written Ministerial Statement of 13 November 2023 on Service Family Accommodation and Winter Planning, UIN HCWS28, how many families in Service Family Accommodation with a damp and mould report will receive a damp and mould mitigation package before (a) December 2023, (b) January 2024, (c) February 2024 and (d) March 2024.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

As part of the £400 million additional funding announced in the July 2023 Defence Command Paper Refresh for this financial year and next, a year-long £29 million programme of mitigation works is now underway to address damp and mould in circa 4,000 homes.

Works are being rolled out as fast as the supply chain is able, at a very large number of sites across the UK. Therefore, it is not possible to provide a detailed breakdown by month. However, the most severely affected homes are being tackled first and over 1,200 have been completed to date. We estimate that around 3,300 will be completed by 31 March 2024, with the remaining circa 700 being completed early next financial year.

Armed Forces: Housing

27 Nov 2023 | 3109

Asked by: Maria Eagle

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much funding his Department has allocated for Service Family Accommodation over the next 10 years.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

On current planning, funding for Service Family Accommodation is expected to be in excess of £1.2 billion over the remaining Spending Review period.

Funding beyond this period has not yet been allocated and will be confirmed as part of the next Spending Review.

Armed Forces: Housing

23 Nov 2023 | 2481

Asked by: John Healey

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, with reference to page 22 of his Department's publication entitled Defence's response to a more contested and volatile world, published in July 2023, how much and what proportion of

the £400 million to improve service accommodation has been spent as of 20 November 2023.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

The Department will receive £220 million for financial year (FY) 2023-24 and £180 million for FY 2024-25, a total investment of £400, as part of the Defence Command Paper refresh 2023.

The £220 million for this FY was received at the end of July 2023 and since then the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) has been working at pace to approve works to improve Service Family Accommodation.

As of 20 November 2023, £38 million or 17% of the £220 million has been spent and the works completed. A further £151 million or 69% has been allocated and is with the DIO's Industry Partners to deliver works. The remaining 14% balance is currently subject to financial approval. The DIO's Industry Partners are fully engaged to deliver the Service Family Accommodation improvement programme.

Armed Forces: Housing

23 Nov 2023 | HL191

Asked by: The Lord Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they have taken to ensure that single living and service family accommodation is adequately maintained this winter.

Answering member: The Earl of Minto | Ministry of Defence

To ensure Single Living Accommodation is adequately maintained this winter, the Department has introduced enhanced planned maintenance for heating and hot water systems with "plug-in" functionality for temporary boilers and generators to improve resilience, reliability, and availability across a significant number of Single Living Accommodation. Furthermore, fault, defect and maintenance management information for heating, hot water, damp and mould is being enhanced, enabling pro-active interventions that will reduce the probability of failure and improve the reliability of installations.

All Single Living Accommodation service contracts are recognised to be performing to the required Key Performance Indicator standards.

A Written Ministerial Statement (WMS) to communicate the action that has been taken to prepare for Service Family Accommodation over the winter period was laid in the House on 13 November 2023. A link to the WMS is below: <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2023-11-13/hcws28>

The WMS includes planned works to address issues such as damp and mould that have greater impact in winter; and measures to improve performance delivering responsive repairs resulting from, or occurring during, inclement weather.

Service Accommodation

20 Nov 2023 | 741 cc5-6

Asked by: Chris Elmore

What recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of service accommodation for armed forces personnel.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

Currently, 96.5% of the service family accommodation meets or exceeds the Government's decent homes standard; only those properties should be allocated to service families. The Government continue to invest significant sums to improve the quality of UK service family accommodation. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation received an investment of £400 million over this financial year and the next as part of the defence Command Paper refresh, meaning that the forecast £380.2 million for this year is more than double last year's investment in maintenance and improvements.

Asked by: Chris Elmore

The Minister will be aware that this time last year, almost 5,000 homes of armed forces personnel were affected by black mould and damp, which obviously included many properties that had children in them. A year on, too many of our service personnel and their families still have this problem. No matter whether it is one house or 5,000 houses, can the Minister set out how he is going to tackle this problem quickly? Our armed forces personnel and their families deserve better than what they have been getting to date.

Answering member: James Cartlidge

The hon. Gentleman asks an excellent question. We are aware that what happened last winter was not good enough. Too many homes were affected, particularly by damp and mould. That is why we have prioritised getting the investment in, and it has more than doubled in the current financial year. I am pleased to confirm to him that last week I set out our winter plan. It shows that 4,000 homes in the defence estate would benefit from significant work on damp and mould, which is about 60% of the total number that require that work.

Asked by: Helen Morgan

A constituent of mine who lives in Clive barracks at Tern Hill in Shropshire has reported that he lives in rat-infested accommodation, sometimes with two to six soldiers living in the same room. As a result, shipping containers have been placed in the grounds—about 40 at the end of August—and kitted out

like budget hotel accommodation for those soldiers to live in. Can the Minister provide any reassurance that these servicemen will be provided with somewhere appropriate to live in the near future?

Answering member: James Cartlidge

I am obviously sorry to hear about that case. I would ask the hon. Member to write to me with the details, and I will look into it with the DIO. The key thing is that, wherever we are talking about—whichever specific barracks or base—if we are going to get on with the works, we need the money there, and we have got that. We have put in place the extra £400 million, and as I set out in the winter plan, thousands of forces personnel will now benefit from that work.

Asked by: Mark Francois

The DIO is not fit for purpose, and the Future Defence Infrastructure Services accommodation contract has been a disaster, including completely unacceptable delays in issuing and checking gas and electricity safety certificates. No private landlord would get away with this without being sued. The Secretary of State had a good run out at the Defence Committee last week, and said he was potentially looking at radical reforms in this area. Can I urge the Minister and his boss to do precisely that to honour our service personnel and their families in a way they are not being honoured at present?

Answering member: James Cartlidge

I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. He knows that I share his passion for seeing genuine step change improvements in our accommodation. That is why we have announced the spending that we have. On the performance of the contractors, which the DIO ultimately oversees, one of the important aspects of the winter plan is a significant increase in staff manning the telephone service, so that we see better service to personnel. We expect the average waiting time for one of those calls to go from seven minutes to 29 seconds. It will be very important to service personnel that, when they make those calls, they get answered in good time.

Asked by: Dame Caroline Dinéage

The Minister may be aware that earlier this year one of the accommodation blocks in HMS Collingwood in my Gosport constituency was shut down all together because it just simply was not fit for human habitation. There are also some issues with the accommodation blocks in HMS Sultan. Could I invite the Minister to come to Gosport to have a look at some of the accommodation on offer for our service personnel? It is simply not good enough, and they deserve better.

Answering member: James Cartlidge

I would be more than happy to do so.

Asked by: Luke Pollard

There is a new Defence Secretary, but it is the same old story in service accommodation, with reports of broken boilers, black mould, leaky roofs and painfully long waits for repairs. Last Christmas, one service family told me that they went without a working boiler for three weeks and were forced to live in a hotel over Christmas and new year. Can the Minister assure me that no one who serves our country in uniform will go without heating, or be forced out of their home this winter because of the dire state of their military accommodation?

Answering member: James Cartlidge

I am grateful to the hon. Member, and I repeat the point: we recognise that performance was not good enough last winter, which is why the Secretary of State made it an absolute priority to get the extra investment in. Having done that, I am pleased to say that the winter plan does include boiler and heating upgrades for about 1,500 homes.

Armed Forces: Housing

04 Sep 2023 | 195071

Asked by: Dan Jarvis

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, if he will define the term satisfactory standard in relation to accommodation for Armed Forces personnel and their families.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

The Department considers the Decent Homes (DH) Standard to be the minimum satisfactory standard for Service Family Accommodation. This is a technical standard for public housing, defined by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and is the minimum satisfactory standard for allocation of a home to a Service family. If a home falls below the DH Standard while a family is in residence, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation will take measures to restore it to at least the DH Standard.

Armed Forces: Housing

19 Jun 2023 | 189069

Asked by: Helen Morgan

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the quality of (a) maintenance and (b) repair work to military accommodation in the period since the implementation of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services contracts in 2022.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

The quality of maintenance and repair work to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) is assessed in a number of ways:

There is a requirement for suppliers to carry out a facilities management inspection of every SFA in the first three years of the Future Defence Infrastructure Services (FDIS) accommodation contracts, which began on 1 April 2022.

Full condition surveys of our circa 47,900 SFA are undertaken on a six-yearly cycle by qualified surveyors. On average, 8,000 SFA are assessed each year. Condition is assessed against the Decent Homes (DH) Standard. Currently 96% of SFA meets or exceeds the Government's DH Standard.

Suppliers have developed 'fast feedback', measuring the customers' initial assessment of the work undertaken; and a metric is included within the FDIS contract to measure the quality of reactive maintenance tasks which is being refined to ensure it is suitably robust.

Armed Forces: Housing

10 May 2023 | 183757

Asked by: Owen Thompson

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what steps the Government is taking to improve the condition of military accommodation; and what progress his Department has made on that work to date.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

In the last seven years, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has invested more than £936 million in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) improvements.

During financial year 2021-22, around £179 million (including £36 million of Government Fiscal Stimulus funding) was invested to improve the quality of SFA.

The 2022-23 investment of around £185 million focussed on modernising homes, tackling damp and mould, replacing kitchens and bathrooms and improving thermal efficiency to maintain/improve Decent Homes (DH) standard to an estimated 9788 SFA, which is 20% of the housing stock.

In financial year 2022-23, the MOD also invested £88 million to replace some of our poorer quality stock with 310 brand new homes. As a result of this investment, 96.75% of SFA are now assessed as meeting or exceeding DH Standard, up from 87% in 2016.

Armed Forces: Housing

27 Apr 2023 | 182413

Asked by: Luke Pollard

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how much from the public purse his Department spent on repair work in service family accommodation in each year since 2015; and if he will provide a breakdown of costs for each year.

Answering member: James Cartlidge | Ministry of Defence

The amount the Department spent on repair work in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in each year since 2015 can be found in the table below.

2015	£30.57 million
2016	£29.90 million
2017	£30.98 million
2018	£32.24 million
2019	£32.35 million
2020	£35.90 million
2021	£38.28 million
2022	£35.09 million

In addition to the cost of repairs, the MOD has invested more than £936 million in SFA improvements in the last seven years.

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Debates

Service Family Accommodation: Maintenance

19 Jun 2023 | 734 cc661-672

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Urgent questions

Service Family Accommodation

20 Dec 2022 | 725 cc143-153

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State to make a statement on the maintenance and repair of service family accommodation.

Alex Chalk (The Minister for Defence Procurement): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his urgent question.

The provision of safe, good quality and well-maintained accommodation is an irreducible minimum when it comes to supporting our armed forces. It is essential to operational output, recruitment, retention, and morale, which is why providing such accommodation is a core priority of the Ministry of Defence.

More than 96% of the MOD service family accommodation of 46,000 properties meets or exceeds the Government's Decent Homes Standard. Only those properties that meet this standard are allocated to service families. However, it is unacceptable that some of our personnel and their families are not receiving the level of accommodation services—in the form of maintenance standards—from our suppliers that they deserve and, in particular, are suffering from a lack of heating and hot water. I have spoken to a number of our personnel, from a range of ranks and circumstances, and I share their indignation. It is not acceptable.

MOD contractors are under a legal, but also a moral, duty to resolve heating and hot water problems. What are those duties? Emergency calls should be responded to, and the issue made safe within two hours. An emergency is an incident that threatens imminent risk of injury to persons, or that presents a high risk of extensive damage to property or the environment. Urgent calls should be responded to as soon as possible and within 48 hours. Those are the terms of the contract that were agreed, but our suppliers in too many cases are failing to meet those requirements. We expect and demand that our suppliers do better, and we will do everything we legally and properly can to force them to do so. Let me be clear: no home should be left without heating or hot water for more than 24 hours. Should it not be possible to resolve the issue quickly, alternative forms of heating and sources of hot water, or alternative accommodation, must be provided.

Rectification plans were triggered by the Ministry of Defence earlier this year following concerns about contractor performance. Since then, access to temporary heaters for families without heating has been improved. A total of 1,500 additional heaters have been purchased, and they are being dispersed

at various locations based on several factors, including where there is a high density of homes.

Secondly, there is an increased use of temporary accommodation to support families with vulnerable people, or where some form of heating cannot be restored in a reasonable time. Thirdly, more staff are being recruited by Pinnacle, VIVO and Amey and, following a call to the National Service Centre about a heating or hot water issue, families will be contacted by a qualified engineer to support the diagnosis of faults, enable remote fixes if possible, and arrange an appointment if a remote fix cannot be achieved. All families will also be provided with temporary heaters, or offered alternative accommodation, should a fix not be possible.

Fourthly, I can confirm that compensation will be paid to families to cover any increased energy costs caused by the use of temporary heaters. VIVO, Amey and Pinnacle are, I know, in no doubt about Ministers' profound dissatisfaction at their performance. I have met them already and I am meeting them again later today. This is not any old contract. This is a contract to support the accommodation of British service personnel and their families—the people who answer the call of the nation to step up and defend us when required. These contractors must improve. They will improve, or they will face the consequences.

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Statements

Service Family Accommodation and Winter Planning

13 Nov 2023 | HCWS28

James Cartlidge (Minister for Defence Procurement): Last December, my predecessor responded to an Urgent Question in the House about the poor state of Service Family Accommodation and the performance of Ministry of Defence accommodation maintenance contractors, particularly over the winter period. Lessons were learned and action is being taken. The purpose of this Statement is to inform you of the steps that the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and its contractors have taken and continue to take, to ensure they are prepared for winter this year.

Improving the level of service for families living in Service Family Accommodation continues to be a priority for myself and fellow ministers in the Department. We will continue to improve our service accommodation across the UK by offering modern, energy efficient homes which are good for the environment and cost-effective for service families.

As winter approaches, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's Director of Accommodation has written to all service families living in Service Family Accommodation to inform them of the provisions being put in place to ensure the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and its contractors are fully prepared, and able to provide the right level of service for families over the colder months, recognising the challenges faced last winter.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has received an investment of £400M over this financial year and next as part of the recently announced Defence Command Paper 2023. This means that funding in the current financial year for maintenance and improvements will have more than doubled from around £160M to around £380M. This investment will be spent on improving the preparation of homes for service families to move into; treating and preventing damp and mould and improving the thermal efficiency of homes; and refurbishing empty homes for reoccupation by service families in areas where demand is highest.

Specifically, this financial year the Defence Infrastructure Organisation will:

- Increase funding for the routine preparation of homes ready for Move In, ensuring they are prepared to a high standard.
- Fund damp and mould mitigation packages for around 4,000 families who currently have a damp and mould report raised, representing around 60% of all properties requiring such work. These standardised packages will include increasing insulation, replacing guttering, upgrading extractor fans, and resealing windows and doors.

- Fund further and more substantial damp and mould prevention works, encompassing everything from replacement doors and windows to full thermal upgrades which include new doors, windows, roofs and the installation of external wall insulation. Thermal upgrades will not only reduce the vulnerability of homes to damp and mould but will also reduce the cost of heating homes for service families and reduce the carbon footprint of the estate.
- Fund extensive, high-quality refurbishments of around 1,000 long-term empty Service Family Accommodation to make them available.
- Fund the replacement of kitchens and bathrooms which will benefit more than 1,000 homes.
- Fund boiler and heating upgrades for around 1,500 homes.

In the last 12 months, 423 modern homes have been purchased for service families across the UK in a £173M deal, as part of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation's Capital Purchase Programme. The Capital Purchase Programme works in partnership with major developers to identify where there is a need for family accommodation and determine the best way of delivering high-quality, energy efficient homes. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has agreed to purchase a further 176 new homes over the next three years in a £78M deal.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation has published communications on both Gov.uk and Defence Connect on the [Damp and Mould programme of works](#) being undertaken across the Service Family Accommodation estate. This includes information and Frequently Asked Questions on what families can expect from the works. Pinnacle, the National Accommodation Management contractor, has also published a guide for families on [condensation, damp and mould prevention](#).

In preparation for winter, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation has been working collaboratively with its contractors to establish robust contingency plans to not only cope with severe weather events, but to ensure services can recover quickly to minimise any disruption to families. This includes:

- Having the right resources in the right place and at the right times as winter progresses.
- Increasing call handling capacity by 55%, with calls on average being answered within 29 seconds as opposed to around 7 minutes last year.
- AMEY has increased its resource by 40% since last winter.
- VIVO has recruited additional out-of-hours staff to ensure urgent repairs are effectively managed over weekends and bank holidays.
- VIVO has created a Customer Experience team to manage contact with families, and ensure communications are in place for follow-on works.
- Better availability of parts, including temporary heaters which are distributed across the UK as needed.

- Using remote technology to help to guide families to resolve simple issues without the need for an engineer callout.
- Establishing indicators and warnings to enable the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to remain agile in where resource is allocated as the colder months progress.
- Continuously reviewing and testing suppliers to ensure that planning, resource and stock holding is at the right levels.

A collaborative DIO, Pinnacle, Amey and VIVO Rehearsal of Concept drill to test winter preparedness plans against extreme weather scenarios took place on 17 October 2023. All three contractors tested their plans to ensure their resource and stock management could respond appropriately to a surge in repair requests (e.g., from storm damage or frozen pipes) and to the impact of weather on the ability to respond to callouts (e.g., in severe snow and ice).

Winter preparedness plans were tested during Storm Babet which impacted parts the UK, predominantly Scotland, on 19 and 20 October and was the first severe storm of the season. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation and all three contractors worked collaboratively to monitor the storm, anticipate the storms impact, and successfully apply severe weather protocols. Additional resource was engaged to manage the predicted uplift in calls (33% increase on 20 October) and ensure all were answered promptly (an average of 58 seconds). Clear communications were issued to manage expectations of Service families with pre-arranged maintenance appointments, and 14 families whose homes were damaged due to flooding, were moved to pre-booked, temporary hotel accommodation to allow assessment of the damage.

In addition, the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, Pinnacle, Amey and VIVO have collectively produced a proactive winter communications plan. A [winter safety leaflet](#) has been developed which is held on Pinnacle's website and is being distributed when contractors attend appointments at families' homes. Winter safety messaging is also being included on social media to ensure families are aware of the steps they can take to keep their homes safe this winter.

[New Accommodation Offer](#)

19 Sep 2023 | HCWS1053

Dr Andrew Murrison (Minister for Defence People, Veterans and Service Families): Today I am pleased to announce the Ministry of Defence's New Accommodation Offer which, from 11 March 2024, will deliver greater access to subsidised accommodation for our Service personnel.

As the Defence Command Paper Refresh made clear, our people are our greatest strength, and the provision of Service accommodation is essential to their operational effectiveness. To support this our New Accommodation Offer recognises the different ways our people and their families live, modernises the way we use our estate, and provides an enhanced offer based on each Service person's needs. We recognised the importance of improving fairness and inclusivity for all our people in the 2022 Defence Accommodation Strategy, and through the New Accommodation Offer, we will deliver this for our people. Defence will also invest a further four hundred million pounds over the next two years to ensure that we provide the modern accommodation that our Service personnel, their families and partners deserve.

The New Accommodation Offer widens entitlement to family accommodation subsidised by the MOD. This will be delivered through Service Family Accommodation, or a subsidy provided to Service personnel to rent from the Private Rental Sector.

From March, Service personnel who want to live with their partner but are not married or in a civil partnership, and parents with children who stay with them for 80 nights or more per year, will be entitled to subsidised family accommodation for the first time.

Widening entitlement to subsidised accommodation is the right thing to do. Inevitably, this will lead to increased demand across the Defence estate for accommodation. To ensure availability of subsidised accommodation for those entitled to it, we will make greater use of the Private Rental Sector. Service personnel allocated to live in the Private Rental Sector will receive a monthly rental subsidy to support them in renting a property that is suitable for their needs, within a daily commute of their assigned location.

Defence will no longer take rank into account when allocating accommodation as using our estate this way increases cost and is inequitable. Through the New Accommodation Offer, accommodation entitlements will be simplified. Service personnel of all ranks will receive an entitlement to accommodation based on their need, which for most will be linked to family size. We will, however, give Service personnel more flexibility to choose the size, type, and location of their accommodation where availability allows.

Many of those who currently receive an entitlement based on rank will continue to be able to occupy a property with the same number of bedrooms under the New Accommodation Offer. However, where personnel do experience a reduction in their entitlement, they will be entitled to Transitional Protection until three years after the launch of the new offer.

As well as widening entitlement to family accommodation, the New Accommodation Offer will address the current disparity between how Single Living Accommodation is charged to Service personnel when it is not their main home. All personnel who cannot commute daily from their home will be supported irrespective of their marital status.

Home ownership will be made more achievable by giving first time buyers the opportunity to have up to £1,500 of their legal expenses refunded alongside the support of Forces Help to Buy.

As of 11 March 2024, Service personnel who are newly entitled will have the opportunity to apply for accommodation under the New Accommodation Offer.

For those who already have entitlement, they will have the opportunity to move to the New Accommodation Offer on their next assignment. After three years, any Service personnel who have not yet transitioned to the new offer will do-so in a programmed manner.

The New Accommodation Offer demonstrates our commitment to improving the offer for our Service personnel, delivering the vision set out in the Defence Accommodation Strategy, and working towards improving our accommodation noting the recommendations of the Haythornthwaite Review. We will go as far as we can to improve the offer under existing policy by widening entitlement to Service Family Accommodation for Service personnel in long-term relationships at eight sites covering approximately 10,000 people. This will apply to Service personnel assigned to these sites from 31 October 2023.

Further guidance is being published today, with a final Joint Service Publication expected later this year.

As well as ensuring our Service People have the choice in homes they deserve, they must remain affordable. We are committed to protecting our Service personnel from cost-of-living challenges. We have done this by freezing daily food charges, ensuring the Council Tax Rebate reaches those in military accommodation, increasing the availability of free wrap-around Childcare and, this year, delivering a freeze in Service Family Accommodation rents funded principally through the penalties applied to maintenance contractors for their poor performance over the winter months.

Our strategic advantage is derived foremost from our first-class people – our real battle-winning capability. Today’s announcement builds on accommodation rent freezes, and an additional £400 million injection over the next two years to ensure that we provide the modern accommodation that our Service families deserve.

Defence Estate Update

22 May 2023 | HCWS789

James Cartlidge (Minister for Defence Procurement): The Ministry of Defence (MOD) continues to review its estate with a view to securing better value for money. The MOD therefore welcomes the High Court's decision dismissing the recent challenges from Annington.

In 1996, the Ministry of Defence, in what was effectively a sale and leaseback agreement, granted a 999-year lease of over 55,000 Service Family Accommodation homes to Annington Property Ltd and immediately leased the homes back on 200-year underleases. In 2018, the National Audit Office concluded in its review of the arrangements that taxpayers are between £2.2 billion and £4.2 billion worse off as a result of the sale and leaseback arrangements.

In January 2022, the then Minister for Defence Procurement informed the House of the steps MOD was taking to explore the extent of its statutory leasehold enfranchisement rights. MOD sought to test these rights through the issuing of enfranchisement notices for eight properties. These notices were designed to explore the extent of the MOD's statutory rights, which are available to all qualifying leaseholders, and to help determine whether enfranchisement can secure better value for taxpayers. Annington were aware that the MOD could seek to enfranchise and had previously referred to that possibility in public facing documents.

Since then, claims have been brought against the Secretary of State for Defence by Annington, Annington Limited and Annington Holdings (Guernsey) Limited in respect of these test notices on both private law (declaratory) and public law (judicial review) grounds in relation to the notices and MOD's right to enfranchise more generally. The ensuing trial was held in February 2023 and judgment has now been handed down.

We welcome the decision of the High Court, which has dismissed all of the challenges brought against MOD. The High Court has confirmed that the MOD acted lawfully, that the MOD was entitled to issue the enfranchisement notices and that those enfranchisement notices were valid.

Given our obligations to secure value for money, this decision has the potential to provide the MOD with more flexibility in the management of its estate to the benefit of Service Personnel and their families and potentially wider Government objectives. I note three points.

Firstly, no formal decision has been taken on further enfranchisement of the estate, but the MOD will consider further the potential implications for securing better value for money for the taxpayer in light of the High Court's findings. The MOD will consider relevant factors, including the ongoing

operational requirement for the properties and the economic case for enfranchisement, which may differ between sites.

Secondly, if the MOD does pursue enfranchisement of other units and the parties cannot agree the enfranchisement premium, the relevant premium will be determined by an independent tribunal in accordance with the relevant legislation by reference to a market value, with both parties having the opportunity to present their respective views. If the tribunal were to determine that the cost of enfranchising the units is less than the present value of the rental liabilities, then enfranchisement is likely to represent value for money for taxpayers.

Thirdly, we continue to work with Annington and, most importantly, the MOD is focused on providing good quality, desirable homes for Service Personnel and their families.

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Further reading

Commons Library research briefings

[Armed forces family housing and Annington Homes](#)

CBP-9441

8 June 2023

[Armed forces family housing: Maintenance issues](#)

CBP-9716

2 February 2023

House of Commons Committee Inquiry

[Service Accommodation](#)

Ongoing inquiry

The Defence Committee launched an inquiry into Service Accommodation. The inquiry is chaired by Robert Courts MP.

The Committee is considering the current issues with service accommodation; the Ministry of Defence's plans to improve services and modernise and invest in single living and service families' accommodation; and what should be included in the Future Accommodation offer.

Ministry of Defence publications

[Service Family Accommodation](#)

MOD guidance

14 December 2023

[Defence Accommodation Strategy](#)

MOD policy paper

20 October 2022

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