

Title: AFF Big Survey – New allocation & maintenance contract
Date of issue: January 2019
Audience: Chain of command, MOD
Issued by: Michelle Alston, AFF Researcher



Issue

AFF surveyed Army personnel and families to determine their key priorities for the new Service Family Accommodation (SFA) allocation and maintenance contract. There were 3,284 responses to the survey¹.

Key findings

1. Families want to be able to manage living in SFA online.
2. Additional and accurate information is needed, especially when applying for housing.
3. Families want efficient and effective repairs, managed through a modern system.
4. Houses should be fit for families - proactively maintained and invested in.
5. New contract needs to be able to deliver – value for money and not just the cheapest bidder.

1. Ability to manage living in SFA online



Families want the online system to be secure online access, to allow the spouse to be more involved; particularly crucial given that Army personnel are often absent.

“There is absolutely zero reason why the current system is locked behind MODNet, it does nothing but create hassle and makes the partners of the Service personnel feel left out and in the dark at the very earliest stages of housing allocation.”

2. More and accurate information

2.1. The top three requests for information available online when applying for SFA were:

1. Having internal and external photos
2. Floorplans
3. More information about local schools and childcare.

2.2. Families want the information to be accurate – only shown properties that are actually available to them (e.g. not command houses or ineligible locations).

3. Efficient and effective repairs

From the comments sections of the survey, we have identified the following themes:

- 3.1. Families want an effective and first-time fix – the correct trade sent out, with relevant parts. Having the correct trade sent out was the top choice for what would be most helpful during a repair.
- 3.2. Families want a proper resolution of the issue, with a full repair undertaken, not just a ‘make do’ temporary fix that leads to multiple appointments and inconvenience.
- 3.3. A more flexible appointment system is needed, allowing one-hour and evening or weekend appointments, recognising that many spouses work. Having a one-hour slot was the top choice of appointment requested.
- 3.4. Families want to be more engaged with their repairs and be able to speak to the tradesperson or local office direct, to submit photos or further details to enable the tradesperson to be adequately prepared for the appointment.

1. 3,284 total responses, however, not all respondents answered all of the questions.

Families were asked: If it was possible to have an online portal for you to check what is happening with your repair, which of these possible functions would you prefer? The top three responses were:

1. Can check to confirm narrower arrival time on the day
2. Able to track where the repair person is (e.g. see how many stops until your house)
3. Able to submit photos/videos to show to help diagnose the problem correctly.

“Our family would like to see service provided on a ‘first time fix’ basis, and that the repair people are equipped and permitted to do this. Too often we have had substandard repairs completed which leads to repeat problems and appointments....and further wasted time off work when appointments are missed.”

“The fact that you had to put “send the right tradesperson” as an option on is absolutely laughable and sums this whole thing up. That should just be a given but this sort of thing happens all the time.”

“For the first time recently, we were allowed to talk to the heating engineer over the phone (previously call centre acted as go between). This allowed us to tell the engineer the problem (send a few photos of our boiler) and flick a switch to fix the problem - initially were given over a week wait for heating, this took five minutes and the engineer didn't even need to attend.”

4. Houses fit for families

From the comments sections of the survey, we have identified the following themes:

- 4.1. SFA should be invested in and updated, with houses proactively maintained to a good standard; not just fixed when something is wrong.
- 4.2. Each SFA should have an online ‘log book’ to highlight issues and repetitive ‘make do’ fixing.
- 4.3. Houses need to be ready and clean for move-in, not to have a significant amount of work undertaken once families have moved in. They need to be adequately checked and prepped during the void period.
- 4.4. Families want to be more involved at move-in; logging the issues online with the Accommodation Officer whilst looking around the property was the top choice of options at move-in.

5. New contract that can deliver

- 5.1. Families want a new contract that is value for money and not just the cheapest bidder.
- 5.2. Some families want more involvement from the chain of command in ensuring the contract is delivering for personnel and families; not that it's just regarded as an external contract.
- 5.3. If an appointment is missed, 52% would like high street vouchers. However, nearly a quarter (22%) asked for other forms of compensation; including financial compensation, citing the impact of missed wages.
- 5.4. Penalties should continue to be considered to prevent missed appointments occurring.

“Please do not go with the cheapest contract. Employ people who are properly qualified but also check on the work that is carried out and this needs to be done by someone who is also qualified and done regularly. Properties need to be properly maintained and not have botch/temporary patch up jobs as in the long run this costs the MOD more money. Use the correct materials for the right job.”