

Independent Commission on Armed Forces Housing: Terms of Reference

Background & Summary

Provision of subsidised accommodation to treat as a home is a cornerstone in the offer to serving armed forces personnel and their families. More than four in ten (44%) personnel live in Single Living Accommodation and almost three in ten (29%) live in Service Family Accommodation during the working week [1].

The Armed Forces Covenant state that Service Accommodation should be of “good quality, affordable and suitably located” [2]. It should facilitate the unique demands of service life; readiness for geographic mobility, lack of choice between location or accommodation options, and acceptance of the remoteness of some military bases. It is a critically important part of the overall military package for service personnel and their families [2].

Despite its critical role, there have been longstanding failures to deliver on such an offer. Lack of meaningful progress has now led to a service that many regard as in crisis. Inadequate accommodation is draining operational capacity by presenting a real challenge to both the health of serving personnel, as well as recruitment and retention. The failure of previous government efforts to make a real impact makes a compelling case for an independent review.

Personnel must be suitably homed so that they can perform in their duties at the operational capacity expected of them without being burdened with additional health risks or precarity due to inadequate housing. Put simply, we cannot continue with the situation as it currently stands.

Core Aims

The commission’s core aims are to:

- a) Assess the current position, the forces behind it and the wider impacts in past, present and future context.
- b) Establish a reasonable, appropriate baseline for military accommodation. The benchmarks will include the pricing, features and quality of accommodation that should be offered as standard.
- c) Determine what changes and costs are required to deliver reasonable accommodation in line with these.

Where possible, the review will include family members when considering the needs and impacts of accommodation for serving personnel.

Evidenced Rationale

1. The three Service Families Federations say accommodation issues are by far the top problem reported to them by personnel [3].
2. Despite its importance, several critical reports by successive Select Committee Reviews, and the commitment to improve by Government Ministers, satisfaction with the accommodation provided remains exceptionally low [1]. This applies both to the overall standard of accommodation, and to maintenance of accommodation.
 - a. In the UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey 2022 (AFCAS), less than half (48%) of those surveyed were satisfied with the overall standard of their accommodation, ten points lower than in 2015. Satisfaction with requests for repair and maintenance was at less than a third (30%, also 10 points down on 2015) as was satisfaction with the quality of the repairs [1].
3. Accommodation standards are concerningly variable, as is the availability and allocation of higher standard accommodation. The Ministry of Defence classified its accommodation in to four grades. Data from the MoD indicates that almost 39,000 members of the armed forces live in lowest graded, Grade 4 accommodation. Over 4,000 live in accommodation so poor that no rental charge is levied. Only 21% live in Grade 1 accommodation [4].
4. The House of Commons *Committee of Public Accounts* have described a “clear link between accommodation and delivery of operational capacity” [5]. Accounts from service personnel have described poor health to themselves or family members due to accommodation problems, and heating and hot water failure has led to some personnel and their families being moved into hotels for their health in winter 22-23 [6, 7]. Accommodation that increases the already elevated risk of moral, mental and physical injury to service personnel and their families is thus draining both

financial and operational resources.

5. Failing to meet the holistic needs of serving personnel and their families is presenting a real challenge to retention and recruitment at a vital time for our armed services and the country, with personnel citing accommodation and impacts on family and personal life [8]. The number of people leaving the military increased by 17.4% over the last year, overall numbers of personnel fell by 3.3%, and recruitment has decreased by 30% compared to the previous 12 months [8]. Belief that action will be taken on the holistic range of issues recorded by the Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey has declined [1].

A swift resolution is critical, however it must be inclusive, sustainable and holistic rather than a stop-gap that ultimately sustains longer term issues and ineffective prioritisation of resources.

Cascading Issues

The impact of accommodation on wider personnel experiences' will be considered for integration into the review, so that expenditure is less likely to exacerbate other outstanding issues and may in fact improve them. For example:

6. Wellbeing scores for personnel have declined over the last year with lower ratings of happiness, life satisfaction and feeling that day to day actions are worthwhile [1]. In the general public, the proportion of UK males scoring aspects of their well-being as 'very high' (a score of 9-10) ranges between 26-33% [9]. These are considerably higher than corresponding results for male Service personnel (9-15%) [1].
7. The review will also link into the ongoing Strategy for our Veterans and consider the challenges of transition for service personnel leaving the military [10, 11].

Proposed methods

8. The methods comprise data collection, analysis, and recommendations reached through a range of processes. The alignment of each process to specific aims may be adjusted if necessary, subject to the data collected and appropriate approvals.

The proposed methodology is set out below:

- A call for written evidence from all interested organisations and parties, to be collected by 20th April. This will be used to assess the current position from a range of perspectives. Input may establish how and why the current position was reached, the impacts, and other relevant information. Evidence will include, if possible, information about the current pilot to improve accommodation. The Commission will arrange follow up interviews with those who have submitted evidence where appropriate.
- Evidence gathering sessions with leading academics in the field. These sessions will gather preliminary data on relevant impacts of the current offer on integrated aspects of military life; measurable baseline standards and pricing of accommodation required to support and maintain the health of personnel; what constitutes a fair offer for personnel given the demands of their roles; and the standards that those serving in the armed forces elsewhere expect.
- International comparisons with a particular focus on high-income countries accommodation provision for their defence personnel, as well as comparisons with other forms of housing in the UK. Issues around fees and affordability will also be considered. Data gathered will include illustrations and examples of best practice, alongside case studies that highlight significant or interesting initiatives.
- Scrutiny of the availability, condition, management and maintenance and allocation of armed forces accommodation from the perspective of armed forces personnel and their families. It will cover all the armed forces and bases of all sizes. This includes considering the value for money of the current arrangements, including contracts with Pinnacle Group, Amey and VIVO. Accommodation in UK territories will be excluded.
- Establishing what changes are required to deliver the reasonable standard of accommodation provision in a sustainable, inclusive and appropriate offer. The review will use the evidence gathered in the previous stages

to consider the choices and the resource implications of achieving an appropriate offer, with consideration of cost-efficiency for national defence. Should resource allow, this may include a cost-benefit analysis done internally or with an academic partner.

Membership and Resourcing

The membership of the Commission will be drawn from those with expertise on subjects including housing, community resilience, the military and military health.

Members include:

Lord Bob Kerslake (chair), crossbench peer, former Head of the Civil Service and former permanent secretary at the Department for Communities and Local Government.

General Sir Richard Barrons, former head of Joint Forces Command

Brendan Sarsfield, former chief executive of the Peabody housing association.

Professor Nicola Fear, Co-Director of the King's Centre of Military Health Research and former epidemiologist for the UK Ministry of Defence

Terrie Alafat, former chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing

Darren Rodwell, leader of Barking and Dagenham Council

Dr Lisa O'Malley, former researcher in the Centre for Housing Policy and Senior Lecturer at the University of York

Further members of the commission will be confirmed after its launch.

All commissioners will act in a voluntary capacity. Poppy Ellis Logan, Parliamentary Researcher for Lord Kerslake, will provide policy, research and drafting support. At least one 1FTE staff will be provided via King's Talent Bank to provide administrative and other support. The commission may consult other experts from academia, the military, and other organisations during the review, as needed. The Commission would be expected to complete its review in 9 months.

Members of the Commission will give their time free of charge. The Commission will need administrative, policy and research support equivalent to 1.2-2.2 FTE for the duration of the review.

Deliverables

9. A product of the review will include a publicly available report to Shadow Secretary of State for Defence Rt Hon John Healey MP.

References

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Commissioner biographies:

Lord Kerslake

Lord Kerslake is Chair of Peabody, Be First (Barking and Dagenham Council's regeneration company), Stockport Mayoral Development Corporation, Sheffield Culture Collective, Sheffield Theatres, Sheffield Hallam University, Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS), New Economics Foundation, Chair of BCP FuturePlaces and a Vice-President of the Local Government Association (LGA). Lord Kerslake recently completed a review of GLA Housing Delivery on behalf of the Mayor of London.

A former Head of the Civil Service, Lord Kerslake led the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) from November 2010, stepping down in February 2015. Prior to this, he was the first Chief Executive of the Homes and Communities Agency. Before that he was Chief Executive of Sheffield City Council and the London Borough of Hounslow.

Brendan Sarsfield

Brendan has worked in social housing for over 40 years, with 20 years' experience as a CEO, including at Family Mosaic and Peabody.

He left Peabody in 2021 to start a new career.

He is now the founding Chair of Sustainability for Housing. An organisation set up by the Social Housing and Finance sectors to promote and develop Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reporting in Social Housing.

He is a Trustee and Chair of Finance and Fundraising at crisis support charity Hestia, a strategic advisor to NEC Software, an advisor to Grosvenor Hart Homes and a Consultant on Strategy, Risk and Governance.

Terrie Alafat CBE CIHM

Terrie Alafat retired from being chief executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH), the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards, at the end of 2019.

Before joining CIH in 2015 Terrie was director of housing in the then Department for Communities and Local Government, with overall policy responsibility for the supply and management of housing across all tenures, housing growth, and homelessness prevention and support. As part of this, she also led on sponsorship of the Homes and Communities Agency. She worked in the civil service covering various housing policies and programmes from 2003.

Terrie was given a CBE in 2013 for services to homeless people.

Terrie began her career in the UK in social services policy development in a local authority and was director of housing and corporate strategy in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea until she moved to the civil service. Her academic background is in social policy and research.

She holds several non-executive positions including Chair of Riverside and Hestia, Deputy Chair of Crisis and trustee of the Nationwide Foundation.

In her spare time, she is an avid beekeeper and loves to spend time with her grandson.

General Sir Richard Barrons:

GENERAL SIR RICHARD BARRONS served as Commander Joint Forces Command, one of the six 'Chiefs of Staff' leading the UK Armed Forces, 2013-2016. He was responsible for 23000 people worldwide and a budget of £4.3Bn, delivering intelligence, Special Forces, operational command and control, surveillance, reconnaissance and information systems and communications, operational logistics, medical support, and advanced education and training across the Armed Forces. He joined the Army via Sandhurst in 1977 and read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at The Queen's College, Oxford en route to becoming an artillery officer. His military career included the last decade of the Cold War and leadership from Captain to General on military operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, Iraq and Afghanistan – often as part of US-led coalitions and in NATO. As a Lieutenant General serving in the MoD he oversaw all UK military operations, including the Libya campaign and support to the 2012 Olympics. He is a Distinguished Fellow at RUSI, a Visiting Senior Fellow at LSE IDEAS, and a member of the Wilton Park Advisory Council. He has a global role with CAE working on government relations and strategy, primarily around the evolution of national and alliance synthetic environments, and he is a founder and Co-Chairman of Universal Defence & Security Solutions, applying the expertise of former Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and MoD Civil Service personnel around the world. He advises and comments widely in the media on senior leadership, defence and security, lecturing regularly on defence policy, strategy, and especially the modernisation and transformation of armed forces through Digital Age technology. He is a former Colonel Commandant of the Honourable Artillery Company and is President of the Victory Services Club.

Professor Nicola Fear

Professor Fear is a Professor of epidemiology at King's College London. Since 2011, Professor Fear has been a Co-Director of the King's Centre of Military Health Research (KCMHR). Previously, she has also worked as an epidemiologist for the Leukaemia Research Fund (University of Leeds) and the UK Ministry of Defence.

Councillor Darren Rodwell

Darren Rodwell is the current leader of Barking and Dagenham Council. His background and path to leadership has lent him the skills, experience, insight and ability to view life from all angles. Darren's role as a Councillor requires him to challenge and advise the government on the real-world issues that affect everyone – housing in particular. He prides himself on being able to deliver on both local and national solutions to large-scale policy issues.

Dr Lisa O'Malley

Dr O'Malley is a Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Crime at University of York. She has a long-standing interest in military welfare issues generally and has also undertaken research with homeless veterans and the veteran charity housing sector. This includes ongoing work on evidence collection for Riverside Group's development of a housing 'roadmap' for the Armed Forces Community. She is also the Chair of the Expert Advisory Board for the Forces in Mind Trust Research Centre.