



army families federation

the voice of army families

Briefing

November 2013

Minimising upheaval during refurbishment of SFA

DIO/MHS routinely carry out refurbishments of Service Families Accommodation (SFA) while families are still occupying them and this leads to severe disruption to the families. AFF welcomes the investment being made on SFA and recognises that these works need to be done to upgrade families' accommodation; however, we feel that the issues facing the families during these works should be given more consideration and that an automatic temporary downgrade be given for the duration of the works.

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Background

Service families move regularly - in the AFF Grab Survey 2012 72% of families had moved at least twice in the last five years however more senior NCOs and officers had moved at least three times and frequently the serving person was away from home. Refurbishments are necessary to improve and maintain the quality of housing stock. However, AFF receives many calls from families concerned about the added disruption to an already transient lifestyle caused by upgrades to kitchens, bathrooms, boilers etc.

During a kitchen refurbishment for example, families are expected to pack up their kitchen and store it elsewhere in the house - in smaller houses this is often the sitting room, which leaves little room for living in. Families are, in theory, left at the end of every day with a connected cooker, a metre of clear work surface and running water; however, the reality is often a cooker in the middle of the room, with everything covered in brick dust, in which a spouse is expected to cook for young children and feed them off their knees as the dining room table is either dismantled or covered with boxes containing the contents of the kitchen. A contact house is provided; however, this is often for several families to use at any one time which is not ideal.

There is no financial help given to families either to eat out, to go to a launderette (if there are any locally). There is no compensation for hours lost from work if the spouse works from home, no help with heating or electricity bills which increase due to workmen running tools or leaving doors open during the day nor is there any help with cleaning the house once the works are done.

The human impact

AFF recently carried out a survey to assess the feelings of families with regards to refurbishments and to ask them what they would like to see improved (See further detail in survey results).

'I certainly have lots of concerns about the amount of work being undertaken and the disruption that the kitchen work will cause (as this is not something I have asked for!) I still cannot believe that they have planned to carry out all the major outdoor work over the winter, which will have a massive impact on our heating and electricity bills, never mind the disruption and cold of them leaving doors open as they go in and out the house to put windows in every room. I am not sure where they expect me to put my three year old all day when they work on the house. Where are our white goods etc going to go when they do the work? How will I wash up / get washing done for a family of five for three weeks etc. The recent letter does explain how doing major jobs helps the Army with reducing their costs BUT it does not explain why we as families should have to put up with such a massive disruption and inconvenience. I certainly do not owe the Army any favours and I do not want to put my family through unnecessary upheaval'

'My kitchen was replaced after only four days of living in my new married quarters'

'The biggest pain was packing all my stuff and moving the fridge freezer as hubby was away'

AFF recently carried out a quick poll through social media to gauge what families preferred to cook on as during the current refurbishments, the default is to replace gas cookers for electric; the overwhelming majority stated that they preferred a gas hob with an electric oven.

Civilian experiences

AFF contacted organisations responsible for civilian housing to see what their policies were on refurbishments of tenanted properties. One rental agency contacted by AFF stated that if a major refurbishment was being done to a tenanted house they would advise the landlord to reduce the rent for the duration of the works. The social landlord, Annington, said that they do not undertake any works with tenants in situ. A council housing department in Surrey said they do refurbishments with families in situ, however, these families will see the long term benefit as they will be there for many years.

AFF VIEW:

AFF would like to see DIO and MHS undertake the following:

- improve communications with the families
- undertake a deep clean of those areas affected by contractors
- identify the worst few days of a kitchen refurb and make a suitable allowance for food
- look into the possibility of doing the majority of works on void stock (AFF realises that after the inception of NEM there will be fewer voids and families will have to have works done with them in situ however they will then see the long term benefits of the works).
- AFF would also like families' desires to be considered in relation to changes to cookers, and for DIO to look at the possibility of installing dual fuel ovens where appropriate.

JSP 464, part 4, already makes allowances for temporary downgrades to be made where there is a significant deficiency or reduction in amenities lasting between seven days and three months. AFF would like chain of command to instigate a policy which automatically downgrades any house undergoing a refurbishment for the duration of the entire works in the vicinity.

Based on the results of the survey AFF has written an article for the Spring 2014 edition of Army&You highlighting the fact that these works need to happen, how families can help to minimise the upheaval and what they should expect during the works.