



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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ALEX CHALK KC MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

Our ref: MC2022/14778/14856/15343/15344
2023/00325
Your ref: MG27076

20 January 2023

Dear Michael,

Further to my letter to you dated 16 December 2022, I wanted to write again with updates on other matters you have raised regarding faults in Service Family Accommodation (SFA) in your constituency.

At the outset, may I reiterate my thanks to you for taking these issues up on behalf of your constituents so assiduously and effectively. In addition to emails from you and your office on 5, 6, 7, 12 and 22 December, we have spoken directly on several occasions – including following your visit to meet service personnel and their families on 22 December. Thanks to your efforts it was possible to intervene robustly to demand and ensure urgent resolution.

Following your meeting with Camberley residents, you provided examples of sub-contractors arriving sporadically, and/or 'inadequately briefed'. You also describe how contractors have patched up 'substandard infrastructure'. You describe the situation as 'disgraceful'. As I have written in earlier correspondence, you are absolutely right to do so. It has become rapidly apparent to me on arriving in post that the maintenance service for SFA has not operated to anything like an acceptable standard – a point I have made very clear.

The Defence Secretary and I are taking every step legally open to us to drive improvements. I have met with the CEOs of Pinnacle, Amey and VIVO to express our dissatisfaction with supplier performance and stress the consequences of this continuing. For several weeks, I and other ministers have been receiving daily updates on the relevant metrics, to chart progress and drive the contractors to deliver improvements. Whilst considerable progress has been made, we still have a way to go to reach the standards required, I can assure you that I am engaging daily to ensure improvement and resolution.

Your office has already been updated regarding the families referred to in your messages of 9 and 12 December, I write to confirm the position below:

The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

9 December 2022

You wrote regarding the delay in progressing work to complete installation of loft insulation at [REDACTED] SFA at [REDACTED]. I understand a VIVO Delivery Manager visited [REDACTED] property on 15 December 2022 and is currently in discussions with her to resolve the situation as soon as possible.

Additionally, I appreciate [REDACTED] has concerns regarding the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of the property, so it may help if I explain the background. A survey on the property was conducted on 31 July 2020 which included an EPC using the standard methodology as governed by Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This takes a number of elements into account to produce the rating, such as the age and type of construction, the size of property and type of heating. The EPC recorded a Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) score of 63, which is a Rating D. I can confirm that the loft insulation was measured at the time of the survey as part of the property's EPC calculation. The EPC and survey data both recorded a 'good' averaged level at 150mm of loft insulation. Anything above a SAP Score of 55 equates to Decent Homes Standard+ for thermal comfort and a D Rating is consistent with other properties in the area.

In addition, the VIVO Delivery Manager identified several further issues during his visit, which have all been logged on the system and are being progressed with the appropriate contractors. The family will be kept updated.

The Defence Infrastructure Organisation have issued an update to families on the GOV.UK website to advise them of the support available. Families experiencing emergency and urgent issues should contact the National Service Centre on 0800 031 8628.

12 December 2022

You cited a number of your constituents in Camberley with broken boilers and a consequent lack of heating and hot water over the preceding weekend. You also queried the categorisation used by the Ministry of Defence's (MOD's) contractor, Pinnacle, in handling loss of heating and/or hot water.

As you know, my officials responded directly to your office on 12 December to reassure you that the five constituent cases which were known to the MOD and our contractors were being addressed as a matter of urgency. By the end of that day, I can confirm that boiler issues had been resolved and heating was working for all the families:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] – the boiler is working, but some residual issues with the central heating system remain necessitating a power flush by a gas engineer. Temporary heaters have been supplied.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

It is correct that loss of heating and hot water should be responded to within 48 hours for what we class as an urgent response. Urgent issues include anything that places the family at risk of harm or will cause severe hardship or inconvenience if not fixed quickly, loss of heating is one such issue. Where a heating failure cannot be resolved immediately, heaters should be provided and, if heating and hot water are both lost, alternative accommodation should be provided.

In response to contractual failures, we insisted on a number of measures. Following their call to the National Service Centre, families are now contacted as soon as possible by a qualified engineer to support the swift diagnosis of faults and enable remote fixes, if possible. They will carry out simple diagnostic checks by telephone to allow fixes to be made remotely (such as how to defrost a condensation pipe) or to provide information to a heating engineer who can then attend the property with an understanding of the problem and with the necessary parts or equipment.

Other practical steps taken by our suppliers include increasing the number of call handlers at the National Service Centre from 15 to 56 and extra staff and sub-contractors to ensure we return to an acceptable level of performance. In addition, we have increased the temporary heating allowance to £20 per day for families without heating, backdated to the cold snap, made temporary heaters easier to obtain, and we are putting people in alternative accommodation much quicker. Urgent work is ongoing to ensure that as many cases are resolved as quickly as possible.

22 December 2022

You raised some further concerns following your meeting with two groups of service families at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and Deepcut.

The Deepcut group of personnel, who serve across a number of sites, both here in the UK, and in the Netherlands, felt there was a lack of a single responsible individual to whom they could report maintenance issues. To this end, I would encourage them to contact the National Service Centre in the first instance, which provides exactly that coordinating function across all Defence housing. The telephone number for the help desk is set out above.

I note that the Deepcut families are also asking about the service and refuelling plan over the coming weeks and months. I am pleased to tell you that in order to improve the security of the electrical supply to the Deepcut housing estate a secondary generator has recently been installed. This generator will cut in automatically in the event of a failure of the original generators and will also automatically start and run in parallel if

electrical demand exceeds existing capacity. This secondary generator will also be used to supply power during generator servicing periods, reducing the 1hr 30-minute outage, to between 45-60 seconds.

Regarding the longer-term solution to the electrical supply network solution, this has not yet been resolved and is reliant on the District Network Operator (SSE) being able to upgrade network facilities. This is still being worked on, and, depending on the solution, the works required may take further months to put in place.

23 December 2022

You also emailed on behalf of your constituent [REDACTED] about her concerns surrounding potential flooding at her SFA. I was very sorry to hear of your constituent's worries, and I am told that we are not aware of any records of flooding at her property. I hope this sets her mind at rest, but if she has any specific concerns, I would encourage her to raise them to the National Service Centre in the first instance.

You also emailed on 23 December asking for details on the cost of electricity and compensation families are entitled to. The unit rate of electricity for SFA within Deepcut is currently charged at 6.9322p/kwh. No other charges are added to this apart from VAT. However, the Department is currently reviewing unit rates for the forthcoming financial year and charges for April 2023 onwards.

I can confirm that compensation payments for families without electricity will be in line with OFGEM guidelines, i.e. in normal weather conditions, residents would be entitled to claim £75 after a 12-hour outage, rising by £35 every 12 hours of outage thereafter, up to a maximum of £300. There is also an additional £30 awarded if compensation is not paid within 10 working days. In this case, a 30-hour outage + the 10-day delay in payment, would generate a payment of £140 per occupant.

I note you also ask about the future plans for Deepcut, and I can advise you that the MOD plans to vacate the houses on the Deepcut estate in the coming years. The plans to return the homes to Annington are currently being finalised, although it is anticipated that the handover will begin with a phased approach from 2023/2024.

10 January 2023 correspondence

Finally, you emailed on behalf of your constituents [REDACTED] at [REDACTED] who had suffered a flood at their first allocated property at [REDACTED] on 11 December.

Regrettably, upon further investigation, it was discovered that the alternative SFA at [REDACTED] had failed its 'March In' due to work being required to the ceiling of the master bedroom, which led to [REDACTED] spending over a month in temporary accommodation at a nearby Premier Inn. I can only apologise for this

disruption the couple experienced; especially given I believe they were married on 28 December.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that the work has since been completed on [REDACTED] and the couple moved in on a permanent basis on 16 January; they have confirmed they are happy with their new home.

[REDACTED] are entitled to compensation for a number of missed appointments and hotel food, and these are currently in the process of being assessed by the compensation team who will be in touch with the couple shortly.

Thank you again for intervening so decisively on behalf of your constituents. Our nation owes a debt of gratitude to all who serve in our Armed Forces, and I can assure you that we are working as hard as we can to improve the current levels of housing support as quickly as possible.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Chalk', with a large, stylized initial 'A'.

ALEX CHALK KC MP