



army families federation

# BIG SURVEY 2016

## the future of military housing

*The Services have a unique role and must not be looked upon as a commodity that needs to be cut. I understand that the contract for housing is coming to an end, and that the 'jam must be spread thinner', but the current consultation feels like the decision to reduce the accommodation offer has already been made.*

The Future Accommodation Model (FAM) is currently being developed by the MOD and, if implemented, will see a fundamental change in the way Army families live their lives. As one of the most important stakeholders in FAM, it is vital that Army families are consulted at an early stage to ensure that their needs and concerns are properly understood. **8,322** people responded to this year's Big Survey, more than all our Big Surveys put together since 2010, a clear demonstration of just how important the issue of housing is to Army families.

### Army families' accommodation preferences

If given the choice of how you would like to live in the future, what would you choose? [6,618 respondents]

- 43%** would like the flexibility to decide on each posting, depending on their circumstances
- 39%** would like to live in SFA/SSFA
- 7%** would buy a house more than 50 miles away from the unit
- 7%** would buy a house within 50 miles of the unit
- 4%** would like a private rental allowance

### Mobility preferences

If given the option of remaining mobile, how would you like your family to live? [6,789 respondents]

- 70%** would prefer to stay in SFA and be provided with the existing package of removals and Disturbance Expense
- 30%** would like to receive a rental allowance with entitlement based on need not rank

### Where do we want to buy our homes?

If SFA was reduced, where would you prefer to buy a home? [6,679 respondents]

- 66%** would like to buy more than 50 miles away from the unit
- 34%** would buy within 50 miles of the unit

*"Every time the Army changes something to 'make it fairer'; it ends up costing us more."*

### AFF view

Army families value SFA and the option of choice it affords them. When given the choice of where they would purchase their home, the majority of respondents would not necessarily opt to live close to the unit. AFF is therefore concerned too much emphasis is being placed by the MOD on providing a package that offers families the option to settle near the unit.

### What is stability?

- 95%** of respondents serve accompanied because they want to live as a family [6,424 respondents]
- 45%** of respondents said they would rather live together in SFA and move on every posting [6,894 respondents]
- 11%** of people said they would choose to live in their own home and have their soldier weekly commute [6,894 respondents]

*"Having lived unaccompanied, we are now living accompanied as he became a weekend dad who came home with a wash bag and some civvies... We decided that a solid family unit was more important to the children than staying in one place with a part-time dad."*

## AFF view

With FAM signalling a move towards Army families living in their own home or private rental, AFF is concerned about what impact reducing or removing SFA will have on families. The survey clearly shows that Army families define stability in terms of relationships rather than renting or buying bricks and mortar.

## Patch life

What do you like most about living in SFA/SSFA? [5,942 respondents]

**74%** like living close to other Service families and being part of a community

**66%** like having access to Service community support facilities such as the Army Welfare Service and unit welfare staff

*“SFA creates a military community, which is a very important part of military life. Removal of SFA would make working in the Army a job, rather than a way of life.”*

## AFF view

The support that a patch community offers an Army family is crucial, as many cannot rely on it from their extended family due to the peripatetic nature of Army life. This support network is nearly impossible to replicate outside of the SFA model due to a limited understanding of what ‘following the flag’ really means by civilians. AFF is concerned that the human costs such as security, empathy and practical support, are not yet properly understood or quantified.

## Removal of SFA and the potential impact on retention

If the availability of SFA was reduced and a rental allowance offered, what would the impact on your family be? [5,990 respondents]

**46%** would consider leaving the Army

**30%** would definitely leave the Army

**22%** would remain in the Army

*“For me, the provision of SFA was a critical element of the ‘offer’. I would seriously have to consider my long term future if this was changed. Whilst the Army expects me to remain mobile, it needs to keep its end of the bargain. I fundamentally believe that this is their moral duty.”*

## AFF conclusion

Three key themes have emerged as a result of this survey:

- The FAM model being developed currently has little ‘buy in’ from our Army families
- Families indicated that **SFA, patch life and stability** are all key, positive characteristics of the ‘offer’
- Families place little importance on the ‘positives’ (home ownership and choice of location) put forward by the MOD through FAM.

AFF senses that FAM is being driven by a financial agenda rather than a genuine desire to provide a flexible accommodation package, and this is echoed in the sentiments of families’ responses to our survey. We know already that people are leaving the Service because they cannot make the balance between family life and a military career work; AFF feels FAM would further aggravate this situation. These results reflect the views of Army families and must be taken into consideration when developing further the Future Accommodation Model.

## Demographic of respondents



own a property  
(whether they  
live in it or not)

