



## Defence Committee

Chairman, Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Defence

Ministry of Defence

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*Dear Gavin,*

The Committee is extremely concerned by both the specific safety risks that have been identified in Service accommodation in the recently published reports from the Defence Safety Authority relating to fire safety, and the general direction of your Department's approach to fire safety.

The DSA's August 2018 report on single living accommodation (SLA) identified a range of serious deficiencies, ranging from unit level to the higher management of fire safety policy. That these failures are said to have contributed to serious risk to life in SLA is entirely unacceptable. The DSA Annual Assurance Report 2017-18 provides the latest indication of a continuing decline in corporate fire safety assurance and again points to a fundamental lack of clarity and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the management of fire safety across Defence. The lack of action on these issues, which have been identified on previous occasions over a period of years, on represents a shocking failure.

As you will be aware, the *Sun* newspaper in late December 2018 made further allegations on these issues, namely that:

- The two reports above had been 'buried' and had not been publicly released even though they were completed several months ago;
- A DSA Improvement Notice was issued to the Permanent Secretary in April 2017 due to non-compliance with safety standards; and,
- The Defence Board was first warned about declining safety standards in July 2017.

The Committee would be grateful if you could address the following questions:

1. How many Improvement Notices relating to fire safety have been issued by the Defence Safety Authority to MoD officials or Service personnel in the last 5 years and, in each case, what action was taken as a result?
2. When did the Defence Board first become aware of the declining standards in fire safety in Service accommodation, and what action has it taken in response?
3. Why the DSA report on SLA of August 2018 was not published until 4 January 2019?
4. We are aware that the DSA Annual Assurance Report April 2017-March 2018 was initially released in late October. But at some point between then and the end of 2018 this report appears to have been taken down from the internet, as it could not be found by Committee Staff seeking to examine it on 2 January 2019. Shortly afterwards, it appears have been republished. Could you confirm whether this report was at any point removed from the MoD website, and if so, what the reasons were for this?
5. Has the Department accepted the findings and recommendations of the two DSA reports, and what specific action will be taken to implement these recommendations?
6. The DSA's 2017-18 Assurance Report identifies the outsourcing of fire safety management in the Defence Fire and Rescue Project (DFRP) as a factor which may further complicate improvements being made in assurance. An even greater concern to us is that this contract has been awarded to Capita Business Services Ltd. Given the appalling performance of Capita elsewhere in Defence, we ask that the Department revisits the decision to assign such important safety responsibilities to a company with such a poor record of service delivery.

These reports present an overall picture of continual decline in fire safety standards over a considerable period of time, though a combination of lack of investment and corporate confusion. It is yet another indicator of the decline in safety and quality of Service accommodation that have arisen through the unsustainable pressures in the Defence budget. As the DSA Annual Assurance report states:

Until these major weaknesses, including those captured within the SLA Review, are addressed the likelihood of a fire resulting in significant loss of life, loss of capability and damage to Defence's reputation will remain high.

We expect this issue to be taken in hand as a matter of priority and look forward to your prompt response on these points.

*Yours sincerely,*  
*Julian*