



Ministry
of Defence

SECRETARY OF STATE
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5, ZONE D, MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone 020 7218 82111/2/3
Fax: 020 721 87140
E-mail: defencesecretary-group@mod.gov.uk

4.8.1.2

22 January 2019

Dear Julian,

Thank you for your letter of 8 January 2019 raising concerns in relation to the recently published reports from the Defence Safety Authority (DSA) and the Department's approach to fire safety. I can assure the Committee that the Department takes the safety of its people and the findings of the reports extremely seriously and we are committed to addressing the shortfalls identified by the DSA. I understand the strength of feeling and am grateful for the opportunity to address your 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 five years and, in each case, what action was taken as a result?

The DSA have issued Improvement Notices¹ as follows in the last five years:

2014/15 - 1 (closed)
2015/16 - 9 (3 outstanding)
2016/17 - 11 (3 outstanding)
2017/18 - 9 (2 outstanding)
2018/19 (to date) - 4 (3 outstanding)

I have tasked the Defence Chief Fire Officer to investigate the actions taken by the respective TLB in each case and I will report further details on outstanding Improvement Notices in writing to the Committee. In the cases where Improvement Notices have been withdrawn, the action taken ensured the issue identified was resolved to the satisfaction of the Defence Fire Safety Regulator.

¹ Enforcement Notices

The Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP
Chair
House of Commons Defence Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

2. When did the Defence Board first become aware of the declining standards in fire safety in service accommodation, and what action has been taken in response?

The DSA Annual Assurance Report 2016-17 was discussed at the July 2017 Defence Board. It was agreed at the October 2018 Defence Board that the Department would work with DSA to agree what action was required by Top Level Budget holders (TLBs). TLBs will be held to account through their quarterly Performance and Risk Reviews, where safety is a standing item that MOD is completely committed to sustaining and improving.

3. Why the DSA report on SLA of August 2018 was not published until 4 January 2019?

The aim of the review was to develop a better understanding of the level of fire safety risk to which Defence is exposed in its Single Living Accommodation (SLA), the ownership and management of the risk, and the factors which contribute to this. Since the report was finalised, the Department's priority has been to ensure action on the recommendations deliver improvements, which it has done so.

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 to 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?

The report has not been removed from the MOD website since its publication on 26 October 2018. The initial published copy was of poor quality; this was replaced by a clearer copy on 1 November 2018. I can confirm that the page has not been edited since that date.

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?

The Department takes the safety of its people and the findings of the report extremely seriously. It is committed to addressing the shortfalls identified by the DSA. The report's recommendations have been considered in depth and a number of actions have been taken since the shortcomings were highlighted:

- The Ministry of Defence (MOD) formed the Defence Fire Safety Management Committee (FSMC) in September 2018, chaired by the Chief Fire Officer. It has established a timeline of activity to address all areas identified for further improvement, and work is currently underway. The MOD has also established the Fire Safety Working Group, to provide specialist advice and support to TLBs on any improvement activities identified by the FSMC.
- The Vice Chief of Defence Staff (VCDS) wrote to TLBs on 7 September 2018 reminding them of their responsibilities for fire safety management and asking them to take a close interest, at the most senior level, for the implementation of recommendations to improve fire safety. VCDS wrote again in December 2018 to clarify the role of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation in fire safety management and to remind TLBs to put in place the correct arrangement to fulfil their fire safety duties.
- The Defence Fire Risk Management Organisation (DFRMO) has been renamed Defence Fire and Rescue (DFR) to better reflect its outputs and to avoid the perception that the management of fire safety risks had been 'outsourced' to DFRMO. Similarly, the Defence Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor role has been re-titled Chief Fire Officer. On 13 September 2018 he wrote to all TLBs detailing the assistance he would be providing to allow them to better understand their responsibilities and how to deliver them.
- A review of Customer Supplier Agreements between DFR and TLBs is underway and should be complete by February 2019. These will better articulate the specialist fire safety support, assistance and advice available to TLBs.

6. The DSA's 2017-18 Assurance Report identifies the outsourcing of fire safety management in the Defence Fire and Rescue Project 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.

Fire risk management will remain a Defence responsibility and DFR (previously DFRMO) will provide the necessary expert assistance and support across Defence to ensure the Department has robust assurance mechanisms in place for its fire risk processes.

It would be inappropriate to comment on the award of the Defence Fire and Rescue Project (DFRP) contract to Capita Business Services given the ongoing litigation on this matter; however, the Department remains confident that the

DFRP is the best way to deliver improved safety for MOD personnel and for firefighters through the provision of modernised equipment and training. The bids for this project were subject to technical evaluation by appropriate subject matter experts as well as rigorous scrutiny by the Ministry of Defence, Cabinet Office and HM Treasury. All are satisfied that the proposed contract will deliver.

I trust this clarifies the Department's position.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

THE RT HON GAVIN WILLIAMSON CBE MP



Defence Committee

Chairman, Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP

Committee Office, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

020 7219 6872 / 5857 defcom@parliament.uk www.parliament.uk/defcom

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Defence

Ministry of Defence

Main Building

Whitehall

London SW1A 2HB

gtec
January 2019

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