Issue 43 - Date: October 28, 2026

Families First

Foreword from Kieron Mullen, Head of Central Support Services at Defence Infrastructure Organisation

Kieron Mullen, Head of Central Support Services at DIO

As Head of Central Support Services within DIO Accommodation, I have the privilege of working alongside colleagues across Defence and our industry partners to help ensure that Service families live in safe, secure and warm homes. A key part of my role is overseeing the planning, coordination and resilience arrangements that help us prepare for periods of increased demand and unforeseen events, particularly during the winter months.

While many families see the repairs and support provided when they report an issue, much of the work to prepare homes for winter starts well before the colder weather arrives. We work closely with our suppliers throughout the year to identify risks, strengthen contingency plans and ensure resources are in place should severe weather impact homes. This includes planning for increased repair requests, heating failures, flooding, power outages and other seasonal challenges.

One example of this preparation was our recent Winter Rehearsal of Concept (ROC) Drill held at RAF Wyton. The scenario planning exercise brought together more than 30 representatives from DIO, Pinnacle, Amey and VIVO to test our readiness for a range of realistic winter scenarios. We examined risks such as severe weather, flooding, infrastructure vulnerabilities and increased service demand, while considering the practical impact these events could have on Service families.

The exercise provided an opportunity to challenge assumptions, test decision-making processes and identify improvements before winter starts. The ROC Drill also demonstrated the importance of working closely with our partners and having clear plans in place for major incidents. By planning together, we can improve how we respond, communicate and support Service families when it matters most.

Our priority is to give Service families confidence that help will be there when they need it throughout the winter.

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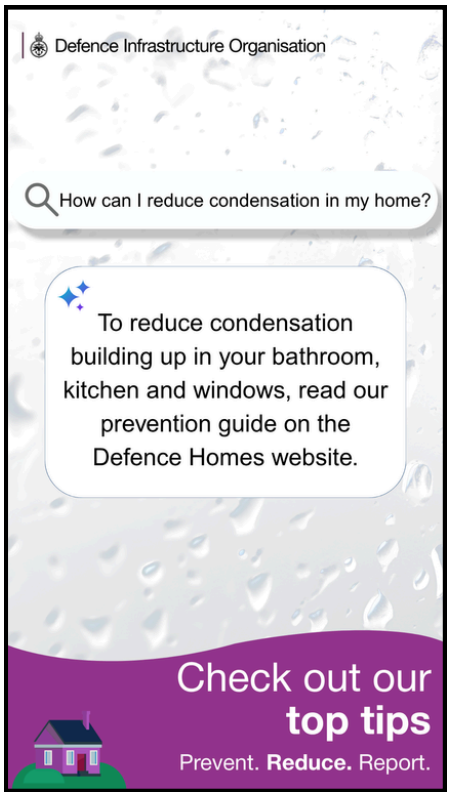
Tackling moisture in your home

As the temperature drops, you're more likely to find things like condensation and damp in your home. You may notice your windows are wet on the inside, droplets falling down and making the windowsill damp. This is a tell-tale sign that your house is suffering from excess moisture.

Why does this happen?

Homes are more prone to condensation through the winter months when there is a large temperature differential between the cold weather and your warm home. To keep your homes warm, you may be inclined to keep your windows closed during the winter, but this means that any moisture created by cooking or showering will be trapped inside the house. As a result, moisture in the air will settle on colder surfaces like windows or walls. Older houses may see more condensation than newer houses as their walls have no insulation, making the inside surfaces colder during the winter. While these homes originally had plenty of natural airflow through gaps in old, single-glazed windows, adding modern upgrades like tight-fitting double glazing completely traps everyday moisture inside. This increases the likelihood for condensation.



How can I reduce condensation in my house?

Burp your house - When you wake up, open your windows slightly to let the damp, warm air escape and dry, cool air in. Typical advice is to keep them open from 30 minutes to an hour. It may seem as though you're losing heat, but this ventilation technique is recommended in countries with cooler climates.

Wipe down excess moisture – As you open each window in the morning, wipe down the window and windowsill to remove any condensation that may have gathered overnight. This is especially important in the bedroom, bathroom and kitchen.

Keep your heating consistent – During the winter months, we recommend keeping your rooms warm by having a low background heat on all day instead of short bursts of high heat when you're in the house to avoid extremes in temperature.

Moving abroad

Moving abroad is an exciting opportunity that offers exposure to new cultures, vibrant communities and enriching personal and professional growth but also brings an understandable element of uncertainty. Navigating the practical considerations can feel overwhelming without the right guidance and support.

The European Support Group (ESG), based in Mons, Belgium, plays a vital role in supporting Service families throughout this process. As part of DIO Accommodation, the team manages more than 1,600 properties across 18 countries. Working closely with Land Management Services (LSM), who source suitable homes, ESG helps streamline and oversee key elements of the housing journey.

Once an assignment order is issued, families become eligible to access housing in Europe. The steps include submitting a housing request, receiving provisional allocation, booking a move-in date, and finally settling into your new home.

Beyond housing, those relocating overseas may need to consider education, employment opportunities for partners, local security, travel arrangements and visa requirements, while adapting to unfamiliar processes, regulations and timescales. Despite these challenges, overseas assignments offer significant benefits, including the opportunity to experience new cultures, build lasting connections and enjoy a different pace of life, often with a more favourable climate. ESG support helps make the transition smoother by ensuring properties meet host-nation regulations and, where possible, higher UK standards. Ongoing support from local Estate and Housing Managers helps families feel settled and supported throughout their time overseas.

While the logistics may appear daunting, the payoff can be extremely rewarding. From day-to-day support to ensuring families feel settled and secure, the ESG plays a crucial role in making overseas assignments smoother.

RED TAPE CHALLENGE

Are you tired of red tape? Check out our challenge on Defence Homes and have your say!

Innovation in Pirbright

Earlier this month, Operations Director for Accommodation, Sebastian O'Hara, along with VIVO representatives visited refurbished homes in Pirbright that are helping DIO explore what future military housing could look like.

Six homes in Pirbright are being used to test a range of innovative technologies in everyday family settings to help understand what works best for Service families and how these solutions could support more comfortable, modern and sustainable homes in the future. Features being trialled include solar panels and battery storage, heated skirting boards and garden office pods.

The project is part of the wider commitment to the SFA estate, backed by a £9.2 billion investment in military housing, ensuring homes continue to meet the needs of Service families now and in the future.

To find out more about the homes in Pirbright, read the full article on Defence Homes.

A new kitchen fitted in one of the refurbished houses in Pirbright. Click the YouTube icon to watch our video.

Have you got the right home insurance?

Many people assume that standard home insurance will cover them when living in SFA, but this isn't always the case. Since SFA is occupied under a Licence to Occupy agreement, you may be responsible for certain costs that aren't covered by typical home insurance policies.

To ensure you're protected, you should arrange appropriate insurance cover of at least £20,000. The Services Insurance and Investment Advisory Panel (SIIAP) can help you find insurers that offer policies specifically designed for Service families.

Find out more at https://siiap.org/

Housing Matters Podcast

All seven episodes of Housing Matters are now available to listen to and watch on Defence Homes.

Hosted by Defence Families Champion, Trish Jakeman and DIO Operations Director, Sebastian O'Hara, the series brings together guest from across Defence to discuss housing issues that matter the most to Service personnel and their families.

Listen to the full series on Defence Homes.

Useful Links

- Contact Pinnacle
- Visit Defence Homes
- Join the SFA Defence Connect page