



The Service Families Task Force (SFTF) continues to work on your behalf to resolve issues that affect Service families. The task force needs evidence from you to take issues forward. So let your families federations, your local HIVE or your unit office know of your difficulties or contact us through the Defence for Service Community website: www.sftf.mod.uk.

The current SFTF top issues, in alphabetical order, are:

- Childcare
- Communication
- Education
- Health
- Housing

Childcare

The existing tri-Service policies are currently being reviewed to take into account new and proposed legislation to ensure as much consistency as possible between the UK and overseas. The MOD Childcare Strategy is being developed and will give guidance to the Services and Commands to assist in the development of their childcare policies. We all know childcare is a parental responsibility but the MOD aims to set certain standards for key issues, such as availability.

The Childcare Voucher Scheme fact sheet has been updated and is now available on the Service Community website. We will continue to update this when any new information becomes available.

Communication

Providing Service families with access to a JPA Centre helpline number for advice or action in certain specific circumstances, particularly when the Serving spouse is deployed or otherwise unavailable, has been agreed. Details of this will be published in the JPA families' leaflet which is currently being produced. Of

course, the JPA Centre is in addition to using unit admin office and welfare staff, your Families' Federation, local HIVE or the SFTF website for information or guidance.

We are also looking at being able to use JPA to send information and advice direct to families in specific cases. This would enhance the current arrangements which involve Service personnel passing information between the Services and families.

Education

Having to sort out new schools before a move is a demanding process. The Children's Education Advisory Service (CEAS) provides advice and support to Service families, particularly if considering an appeal. The Service Community website has comprehensive advice, including the guide for service families on moving, and CEAS can be contacted on 01980 618244. A new CEAS website is now available at www.ceas.mod.uk.

Service children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) sometimes experience disruption in support due to the frequency of moving schools. We are working with the DfES to ensure that any changes to the SEN statements process fully supports the more mobile Service community.

Defence Committee Inquiry into the Education of Service Children

We are awaiting the report from the Defence Select Committee which should be available by the end of July. We are working closely with the DfES to address any problems raised in this report.

Health

Access to NHS dental treatment is a nationwide problem but one which can be exacerbated by Service life. A study on the problems faced by Service families throughout the UK has been carried out highlighting options for addressing this issue.

Families should continue to use NHS Direct in England and Wales (and the equivalent in Scotland and Northern Ireland) to access NHS dental services and any problems, including access to private dental treatment, should be reported to the local HIVE, the Families Federation or direct to the Service Community website.

Housing

Difficulties have arisen with the transition to HPC. Defence Estates (DE) and Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) are working closely to resolve

the problems experienced since the roll out.

Separation

When a marriage or civil partnership breakdown occurs, no matter what the reason, it can be a traumatic time for all involved. Families of Service Personnel may feel they have no one to turn to for help and advice. There are many welfare agencies where you can go including Single Service Welfare Organisations ([Army Welfare Service](#) and [Naval Personal and Family Support](#)), Unit Welfare Officers, Armed Forces Confidential Support Line, [SSAFA-FH](#) and your local Social Work Services. Your local [HIVE](#) will know how to contact these agencies.

The MOD, in conjunction with the three Services and SSAFA-FH, produce the 'Coping with breakdown in Marriage booklet' which is full of help and advice for anyone who is going through separation. You can get a copy of this booklet from SSAFA Head Office, Service Welfare Agency and the HIVE.

SSAFA-FH have two '[Stepping Stone Homes](#)', which offer temporary accommodation to separated Service and ex-Service families. The Homes, (based in London and the north east of England) not only offer temporary accommodation, but also help and assistance in finding a permanent home. They also provide the time and space in which a separated family can reflect before reconciling a difficult marital situation. Any woman, with or without children, who will be homeless, is about to be evicted with nowhere to go, or is in need of emergency accommodation, may qualify for accommodation at a SSAFA Stepping Stone Home.

The [Services Cotswold Centre](#) in Neston, Wiltshire, also offers temporary accommodation for estranged wives/partners and their families. You can find out more information about the Cotswold Centre from your local HIVE, your Unit Welfare Officer or Administration Officer.