

 **ROYAL  
AIR FORCE**  
**Families  
Federation**

Investigate | Influence | Change

RAF FF Survey Report for the  
**Future Accommodation Project Team**



September 2011

**WE'RE IN YOUR  
CORNER**



## Introduction by the Chairman

Ever since the launch of the RAF Families Federation in Nov 07, housing and accommodation issues have dominated the database. Issues range from the condition of current housing, the maintenance service, allocation policies and entitlements, shortages of accommodation in key areas and the customer service delivered by DIO staffs and their sub-contractors.

Evidence is gathered by the Federation team via two key methods – reactive, which involves individual family members contacting the Federation with a specific issue (summarised on page 6); and proactive, which entails the Federation staff designing bespoke surveys and interactive workshops to gather evidence across a wider spectrum.

Whilst reactive evidence tends to focus on the ‘here and now’ of accommodation, the proactive workshop was deliberately designed to look ahead, asking audiences to consider the future provision of accommodation to better meet their families’ aspirations whilst contributing to the Service’s need for a mobile, agile and adaptable force.

Following the launch of an inaugural Future Accommodation interactive workshop in 2010, the RAF Families Federation offered their results to the Future Accommodation Project (FAP) Team in MoD, established in early 2011 as part of the New Employment Model (NEM) work streams. Questions used by the Federation in 2010 were refined, added to by the FAP Team and then shared with the other Service Families Federations to enable evidence-gathering on a tri-Service basis.

The RAF Families Federation ran their survey both online and during live interactive voting sessions during unit visits from 1 Jun – 31 Aug 11. More than 1,100 personnel participated in this survey, an unprecedented response. Not only did hundreds of serving and non-serving RAF family members vote in response to specific questions but more than 1,000 individual comments were provided online, demonstrating the strength of feeling evoked by this subject.

The RAF Families Federation would like to thank every single person who contributed evidence to this survey and to assure them that their evidence will be added to the weight of evidence already provided by Royal Navy, Royal Marine and Army families, who have contributed their views via their respective Federations. Together, we have gathered over 6,000 votes and a mass of quotes that will certainly leave the FAP Team and the wider NEM staffs in no doubt as to the importance Armed Forces families attach to accommodation issues.

Clearly, there may be differences in opinion between the Services, reflecting different approaches to accompanied service or home ownership, but that is for the FAP to take into account when coming up with an accommodation Strategy to suit all three Services in the future.

This report provides top-level results of all questions posed in the ‘Future Accommodation’ survey, and a few selected from our separate ‘Definition of Family’ and ‘RAF Way of Life’ surveys where we felt this impacted on housing issues. Further, more detailed analysis is possible, for example comparing votes by age, gender, marital status or rank, but, for the purposes of this report, we have provided top-level analysis only, supported by selected quotes which we believe reflect the views of the majority. Quotes provided as part of this survey will be placed on our website at [www.raf-ff.org.uk](http://www.raf-ff.org.uk) should anyone wish to read them in their entirety.



D A McCAFFERTY  
Chairman  
**RAF Families Federation**

## Methodology

The Future Accommodation survey was run at five RAF units as interactive workshops with live audiences comprising serving and non-serving family members. The team used the Turning Point voting technology to collect all data and this was then uploaded into the central Federation database. Quotes collected from some very lively audiences were also entered into the database.

The survey was carried online via the Federation website and was promoted at Families Days and Conferences and via regular articles in Envoy, the Diaspora newsletter, BFBS radio broadcasts and AMP's Bulletin. The survey was highlighted to many key contacts within the chain of command, with particular support from AMP's Briefing Team, who advised all unit audiences they visited of our work – we remain grateful for their enduring support.

Social networking also worked well, with Facebook fans and Twitter and Blog followers cascading the survey to their contacts, enabling the Federation to reach a far wider audience than ever before. Results from the survey, utilising the Kwik Survey system, were uploaded into the central database, combined with the data collected from live audiences, creating a significant pool of valuable evidence.

### Participant Data

The survey was completed by 1,152 personnel, although several hundred more visited the site only to opt out of completing the survey for some reason. These casual visits or incomplete surveys were not recorded as part of the totals.

The last six questions of the survey were drawn from the 'Definition of Family' and 'RAF Way of Life' surveys, which were running concurrently. These had fewer participants than the Future

Accommodation survey (188 and 267 respectively) so percentages quoted need to be read in the context of a smaller pool of voters.

The survey attracted votes from 88 separate locations around the world, including the majority of UK RAF bases and personnel based as far afield as Cyprus, South Africa, Belgium, Brunei, the USA, Germany, Italy, Kenya and New Zealand.

The breakdown of serving versus non-serving family members was 73% serving and 27% non-serving, a far higher proportion of non-serving than we have achieved before. The gender breakdown was 56% female and 44% male, a surprising dominance by the ladies given the high ratio of serving males but perhaps reflective of the significant level of involvement women have in housing issues.

In terms of their relationship to the serving person, 13% of our participants classed themselves as serving and single, with no current partner. 48% were serving with a non-serving partner, and 9% were serving and also had a partner serving in the Armed Forces. 27% were non-serving spouses and 3% said they were non-serving partners, (unmarried).

Votes came from across the rank structure, with every rank represented. The most represented ranks were cpl, sgt, flt lt and sqn ldr. The split between commissioned and non-commissioned voters was 30% commissioned and 70% non-commissioned.

Voters ranged in age from under 21 to over 56, with the majority of votes (42%) coming from the 30-40 year olds, with a further 31% aged 41-55. The higher proportion of more mature respondents perhaps reflects the stage of life at which personnel and families consider

homeownership, making such a survey of more interest to this group than those under 30.

In terms of personal status, our respondents classified themselves as follows: 6% single with no current partner; 6% single but in a long-term relationship; 70% married or in a Civil Partnership for the first time; 13% married or in a Civil Partnership for a second or subsequent time; 2% separated, 3% divorced; and 2% widowed. These figures reflect the ratios arising from previous survey activity and we believe they represent a fair breakdown of marital status albeit we suspect the proportion of divorced personnel is distorted by those now placing themselves in other categories.

Finally, of our respondents, 66% stated they lived for the majority of the week in SFA, with 2% in SSFA; 14% lived in SLA, with 1% in SSLA; 14% lived in their own home and 2% lived in privately rented accommodation.

## Key Findings

The graphs and quotes that follow illustrate the very high level of interest in housing issues and the strong emotions the subject evokes. Many personnel took time to write copious notes as part of the survey and we have selected a representative sample to illustrate the views expressed. From our top-level analysis of the votes received, we believe the key findings from an RAF families' perspective are:

1. Homeownership is already at a high level (46%) and the vast majority say that homeownership is important to them.
2. RAF families buy homes to get on the housing ladder and provide family stability.
3. Homeownership is viewed as unaffordable by a significant (32%) proportion of families and many (15%) see it as incompatible with mobile Service life.
4. Low charges for SFA/SLA remain attractive, as does living in the Service community but the condition and size of properties are disincentives.
5. Most families (25%) would like to buy a home in the area they wish to settle post-service but 18% express a desire to own close to the RAF.
6. More than half would not wish to see the provision of accommodation limited but others were open-minded to alternative options, with a monthly housing allowance and a one-off grant attracting positive votes.
7. Significant majorities expressed a view that reduction of SLA/SFA would increase pressure on families and undermine team and unit cohesion.
8. The majority of RAF families (64%) would choose to serve accompanied albeit a significant 21% would opt to settle the family and serve unaccompanied.
9. 18% of respondents commute over 50 miles between home and parent unit, with 4% only getting home monthly or less. 5% of commuters have been doing so for more than 3 years.
10. The most significant life event impacting on a decision to stabilise a family is a child starting secondary school.
11. The majority of voters would wish to see future accommodation policies as more inclusive of unmarried partners, especially those with children; those with children over 18; and divorced parents.

# Reactive Evidence

Housing has been consistently the highest reported issue category since the launch of the RAF Families Federation. Over those four years however, we have seen a subtle shift in the types of housing issues reported (see graph below). Initially, we received a large number of complaints about the condition and maintenance of Service Family Accommodation (SFA), most of which were attributed to Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) as the primary contractor in England and Wales.

We are still contacted by families who have problems with their SFA maintenance but those issues that have arisen of late have been of a more significant and serious nature, often involving multiple agencies. That said, recently-introduced regular meetings between our Evidence Assistant (Housing) and

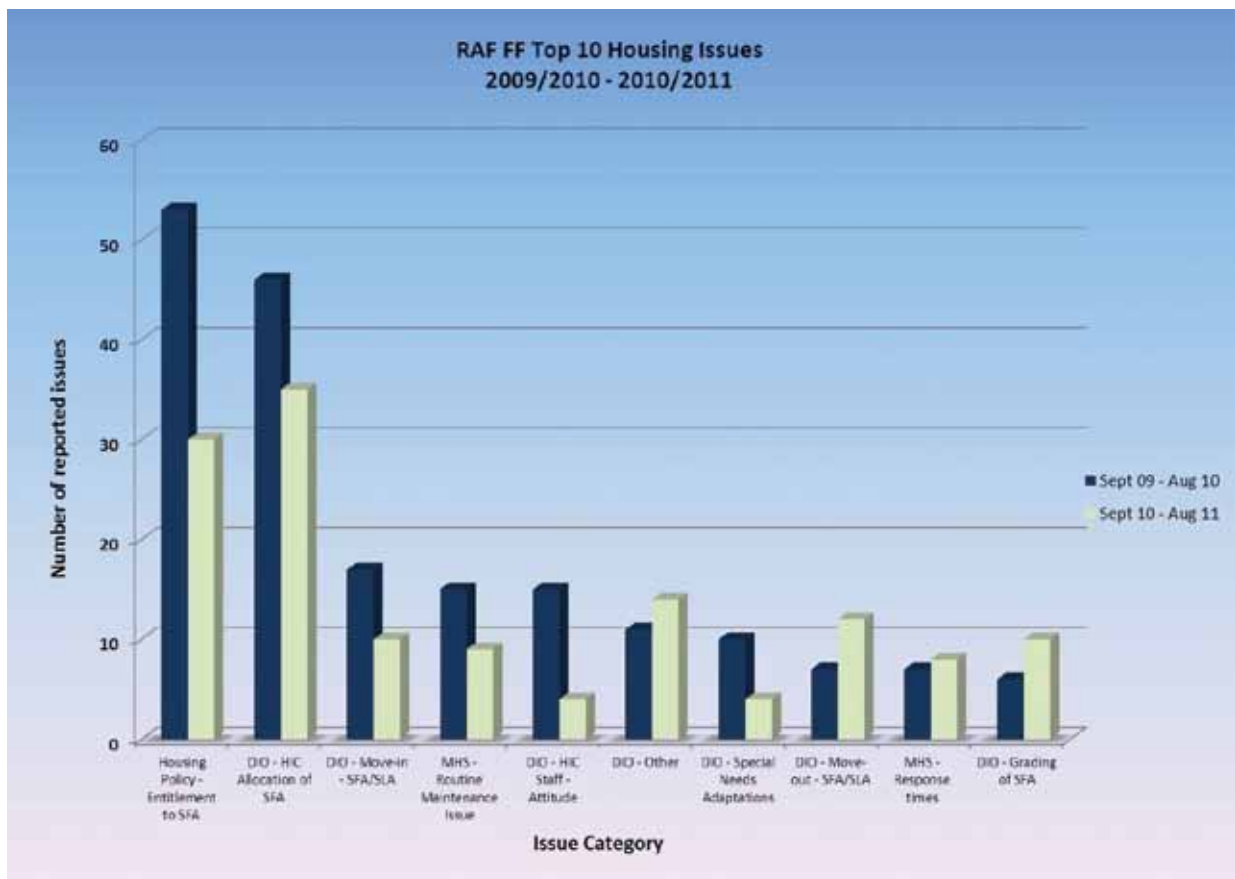
the MHS focal point Customer Care Manager have created a system which pinpoints problems quickly and enables rapid resolution by MHS staff before the situation deteriorates into what previously might have caused a 'stand-off' between MHS and occupants. We also liaise with DIO HIC staff on a regular basis to ensure that our families are receiving the right level of support.

Over the last two years we have seen an increase in the number of reported concerns regarding the allocations and entitlement policies. On the allocations front, there are several RAF units that have absolutely no spare SFA capacity and families are being accommodated at alternative sites, often some distance from the community support facilities of their parent unit and with the added disadvantage of having to

pay a 'Home to Duty' contribution despite the lack of choice over where they live.

On the policy front, families are becoming more frustrated with the current regulations and frequently implore the Federation to challenge the existing rules, which appear to be based upon a definition of the family from a bygone era and do not take into consideration the differing family models which exist in the RAF in the 21st century.

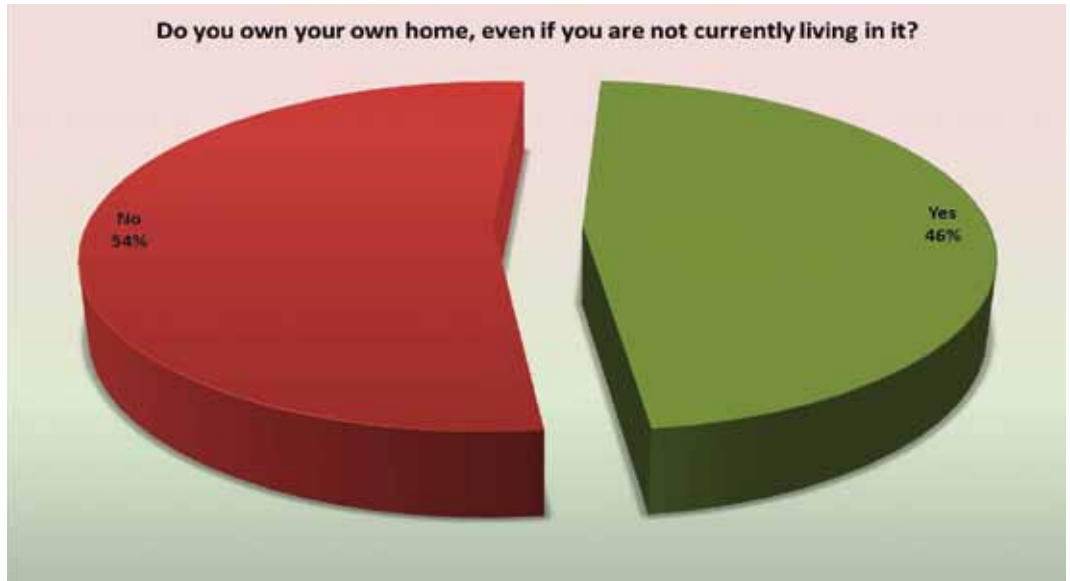
The Federation produces a number of evidence reports based upon the concerns raised to us. This report to the Future Accommodation Project (FAP) team is a welcome opportunity to ensure that the 'light blue' perspective on accommodation is represented at the highest levels, hopefully influencing future policy.



# Proactive Evidence

As evidenced in earlier reports, a high percentage of RAF families own their own home.

Question 1



“ We have considered purchasing a property in the past with a view to renting it, but have spoken to many Service families who have encountered difficulties with this. We therefore have decided to wait until my husband leaves the Service. ”

“ We used to own our own home where we wanted to settle but the stress of renting it out long-term was not worthwhile as we would never live in it whilst he was serving and he wanted a full career. ”

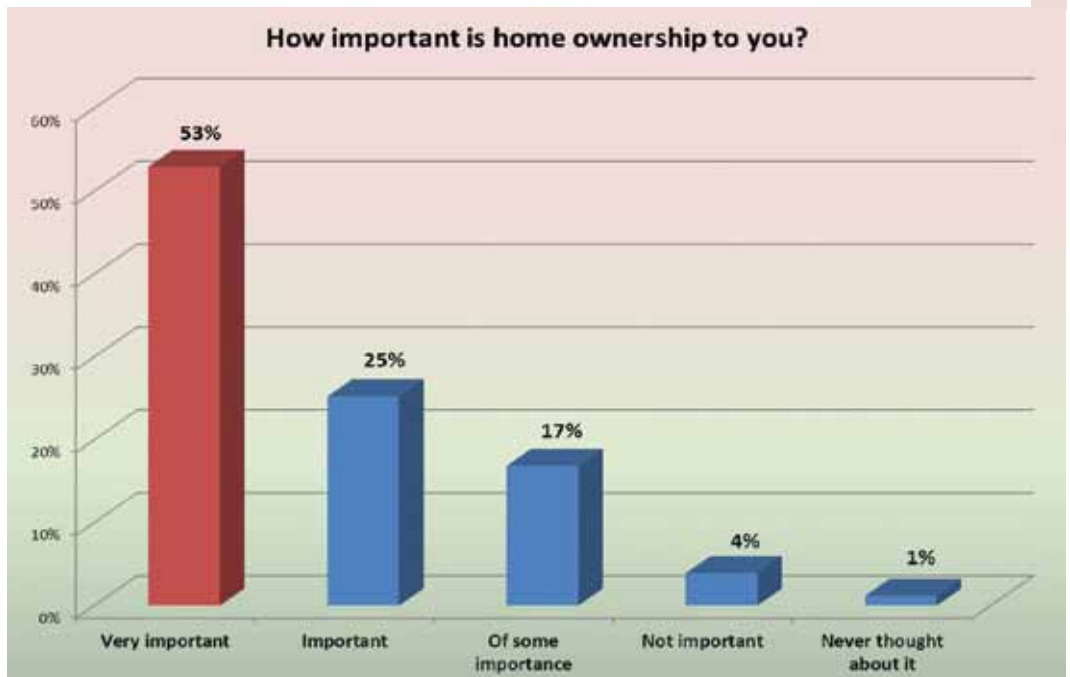
“ I will buy in the location I wish to retire in as I am not prepared to buy in areas I do not really wish to live. Good schools would be a major factor in house location as would prices. As the only earning family member I cannot afford the deposit for a reasonable house and would also not wish to live away from my young family. I would not be able to afford to be a weekend parent under the current allowance rates. Military life does not give me the opportunity to choose my location so I should not be disadvantaged by an unstable housing market. ”

“ We would love to buy our own home but can't afford it at the moment. ”

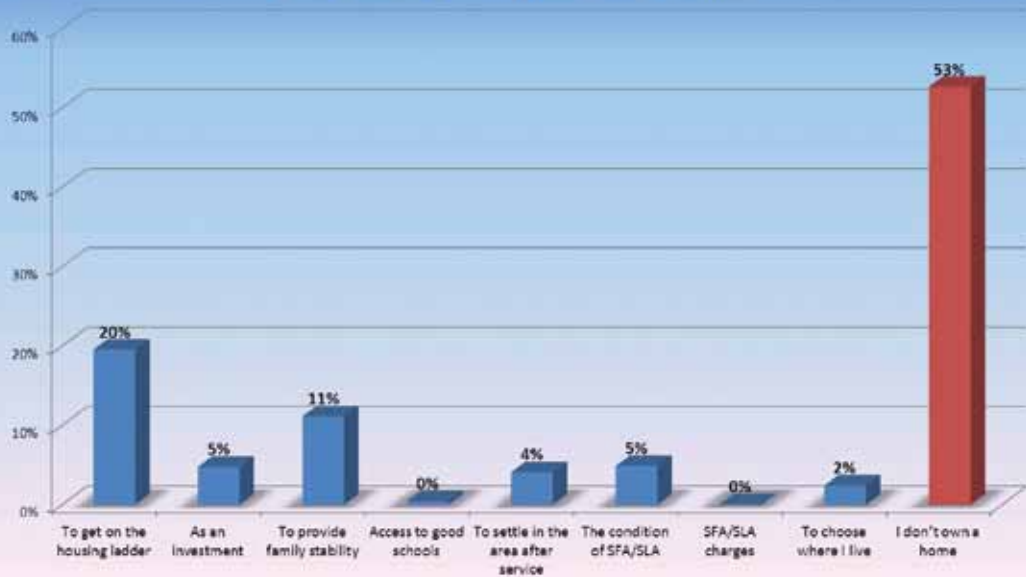
“ Would love to be a homeowner, however the market is too volatile and there are not enough incentives to assist in buying a property - Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) is good, but as the sole wage earner, it is virtually impossible to save enough money towards a deposit. ”

78% of our respondents felt that home ownership was important or very important, with only 1% claiming they had never considered it.

Question 2



**If you already own your own home,  
what was the MAIN reason you bought it?**



The top motivations for owning a property were to get a foot on the housing ladder and provide stability for the family.

**Question 3**

“ We had to buy a property for my children to live in as they were not classed as dependants and therefore not entitled to come to Cyprus with us. ”

“ Constant movement AND the desire to put down roots in a nice area with good schools, coupled with the poor quality of Service housing led us to buy when and where we did; there wasn't one single main reason for buying. ”

“ I was reluctantly forced to buy my home. As a single parent, once my 16 yr old had elected not to continue with further education, my entitlement to a three bed SFA ended. This policy needs some investigation as it seems inappropriate that a 16 yr old should have to apply for housing in their own right. ”

“ I have bought my own property because SFA are in poor condition and also because of the inadequate maintenance provided. Repairs are poorly carried out and the lack of thought and respect for my family was distressing for all. ”

“ One of the motivating factors for buying our own home was to be free of the petty restrictions of living in SFA. ”

“ We only bought our own house because at the time we were not married and so not entitled to SFA. We are now left with a house next to a base I don't work at and unable to sell it because of the recession. It is a bad idea buying homes next to a base you'll only be at for a limited time. ”

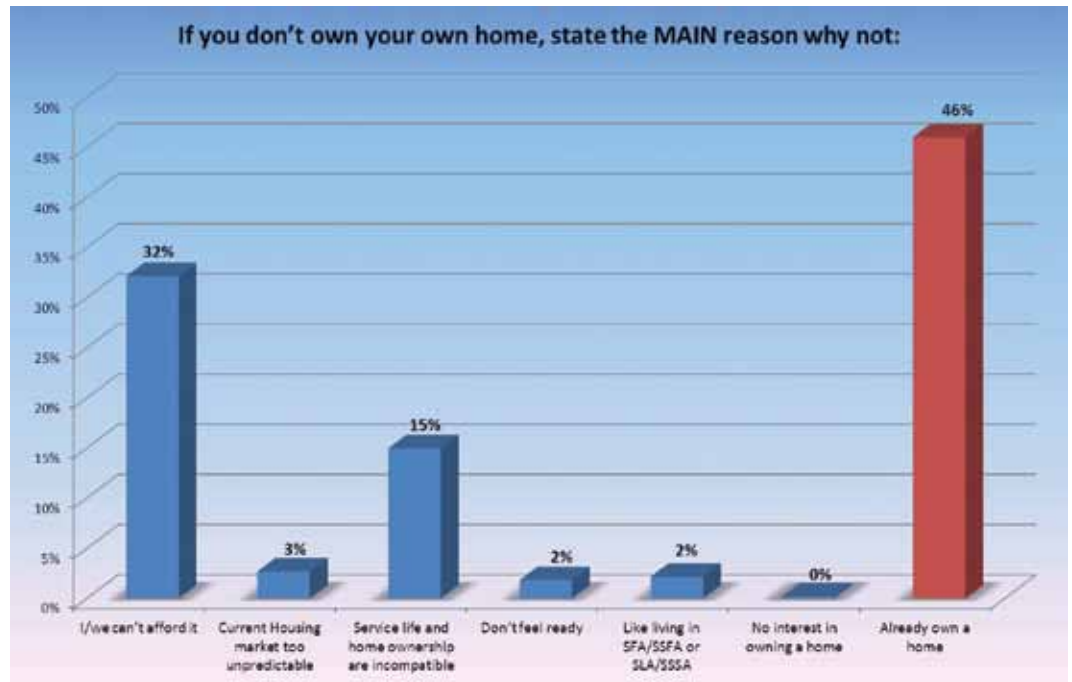
“ We bought a house many years ago as it was a good time to buy and near RAF Lyneham. We wanted to live in the area and have a safe environment for the children to grow up. Also, the area provided good employment opportunities for my wife and we have both been active in taking up posts within the local community. ”

“ Although we have bought a home it is purely so we can settle in that area when my career in the RAF finishes. Since buying the house I have been posted three times in three years and moving bases is stressful enough without trying to buy a house as well. The government needs to support its Forces before morale drops even further! ”

“ The house allocated for us was so small that we felt that it wasn't fair on our children, therefore we had to purchase something locally where prices are very high. ”

Almost a third of respondents felt they could not afford to own their own home and a further 15% felt that homeownership and Service life were incompatible.

Question 4



“ We are putting money away ready to buy a house when I leave. There is no point buying now. We have no interest in only being able to see each other, and me the kids, at weekends because I was posted after buying. ”

“ We cannot afford to buy our own home as both of us are in the RAF and pay £1,500 a month for childcare. If we had mortgage payments to pay we would literally not be able to pay for food or utilities. ”

“ With the cost of childcare we cannot afford a mortgage. When our child attends mainstream school that is when we will start to look to purchase a house. ”

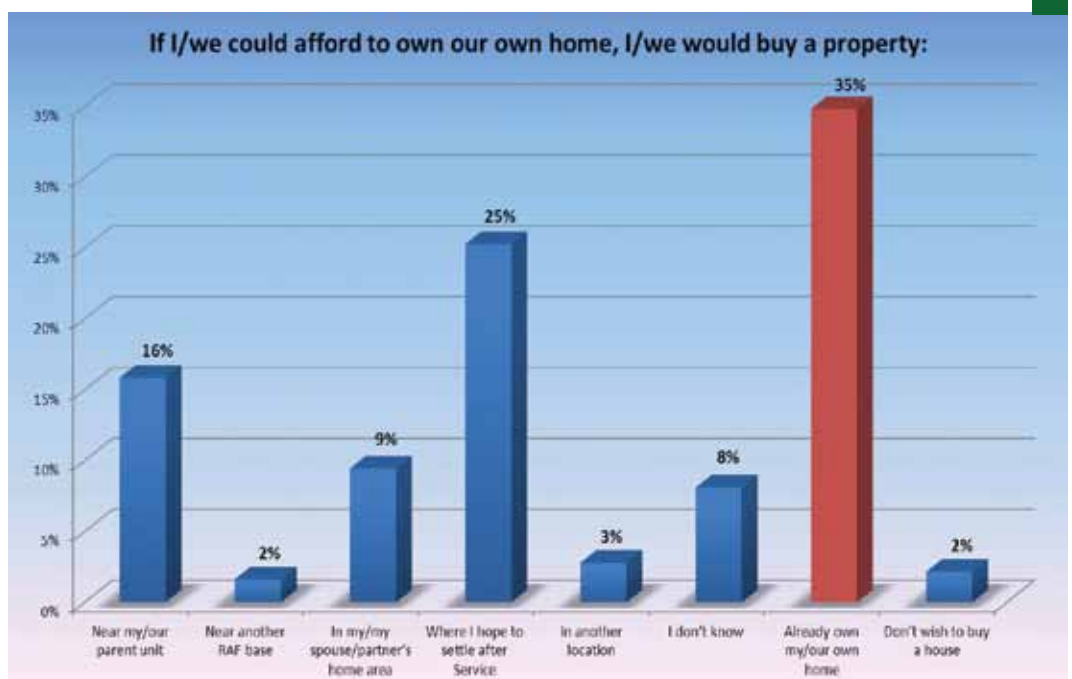
“ My child is in boarding school so I can remain able to move every couple of years to wherever the Service requires. I do not wish to live apart from my family. I could not afford to pay for both the school fees and for a mortgage. ”

“ When faced with having to move and with the recession ongoing it is great to know there is SFA for us. It is not practical to expect families to sort their own housing out, buying and selling can take a long time, renting is not ideal and there is already a stress on relocating families with the non-serving spouse/partner having to find a job. ”

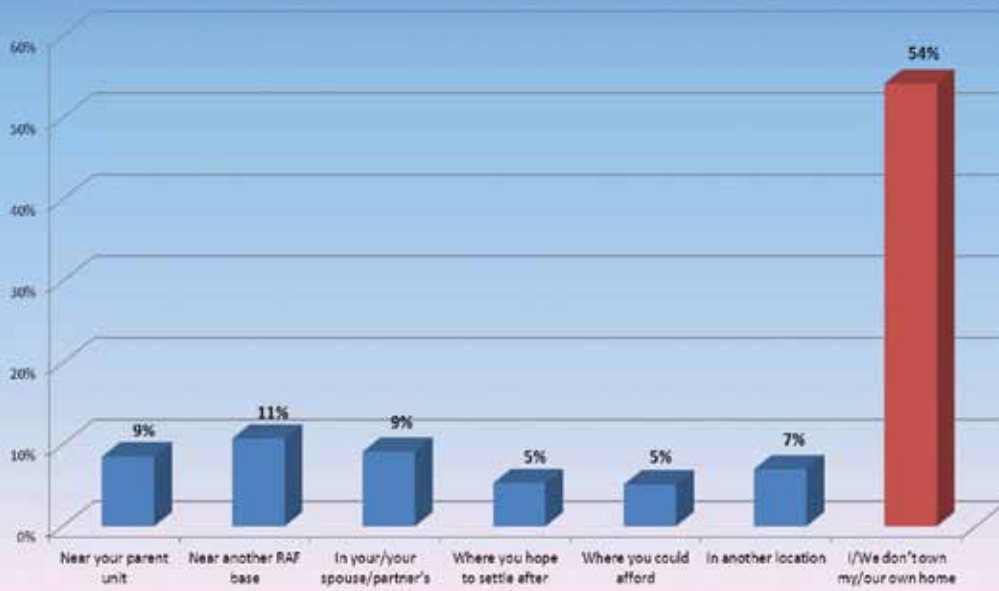
“ We would consider home ownership if it was a)affordable and b)we were guaranteed that my husband would not be posted away. Being together as a family is far more important to us than home ownership. ”

A quarter of respondents expressed a desire to own a home in the location where they hoped to settle post service, with 16% wishing to own a home near their current parent unit.

Question 5



**If you have already bought your own home, is it:**



Of those who own their own home, 20% live either near their current parent unit or another RAF base.

**Question 6**

“ We purchased a property near our parent unit, earlier than planned, because the accommodation on offer was unsuitable for a family (far too small - 2½ bedrooms). We now find ourselves in the unfortunate position of having to sell it in a difficult market as this unit is now closing. ”

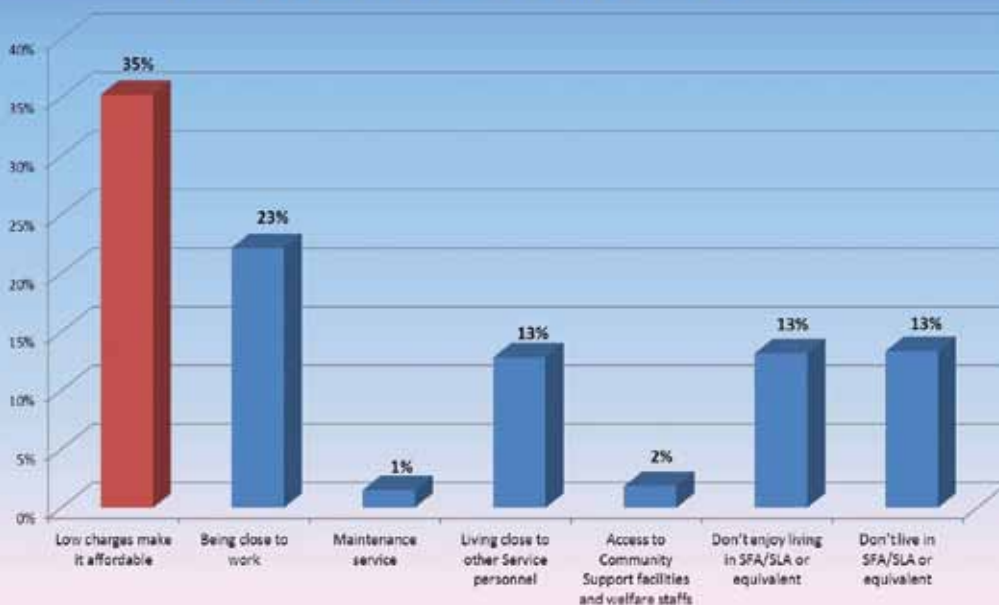
“ I have bought and sold five properties, all in order to live close to my duty Station; on this latest posting I could not afford to move to the new area nor could I afford the overhead costs associated with buying and selling. I have spent over £60K of my own money on these moves simply to enable me to have a decent standard of living as befitting for someone my age within decent commuting distance. ”

“ In times where we are dealing with constant cut backs, allowances being withdrawn, at least the fact you will be provided accommodation at a new unit, regardless of your circumstances, is one less thing to worry about. ”

“ Living in SLA is a God send when you start your career. You are not on a lot of money so having to fork out £300+ a month for rent off base is unaffordable. Plus it is part of the Service ethos and sociable in the block! ”

“ Having moved less than every 2 years on average over the last 17 years it would have been impossible to keep buying and selling our own house to move. And I want to be WITH my husband NOT miles away. The cheaper SFA rent has allowed us to purchase a property for living in when he comes out and we only have to go through the hassle once! ”

**What do you like MOST about living in SFA/SSFA or SLA/SSSA?**

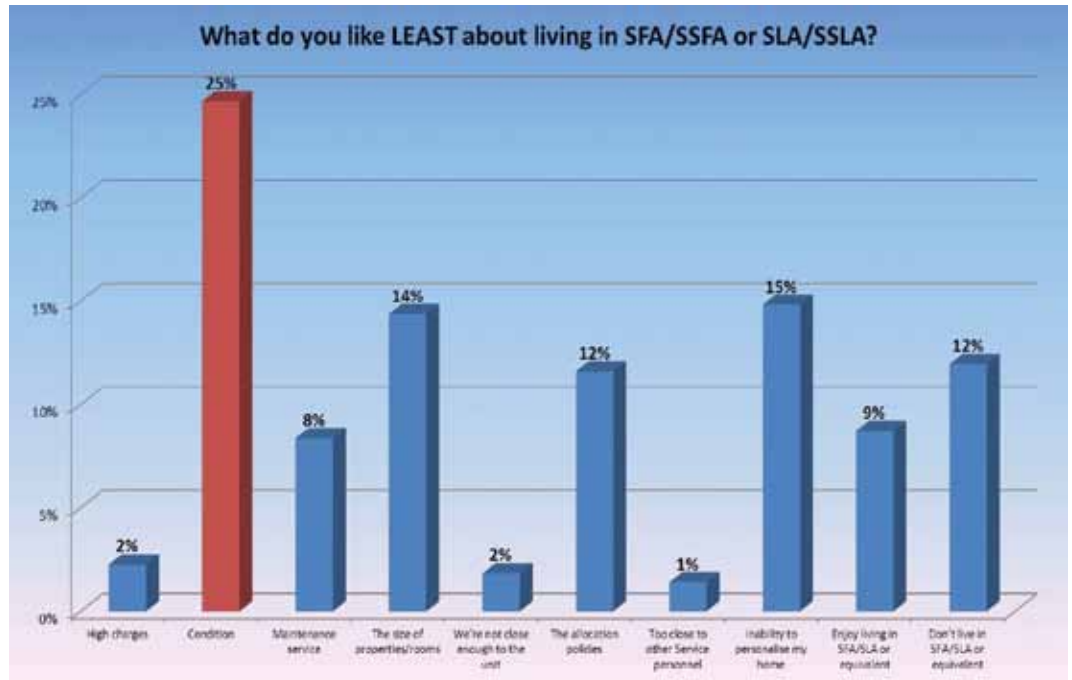


More than a third of respondents cited low charges as the factor they liked most about living in Service accommodation, but many also liked being close to work and with other Service families. 13%, however, did not like living in SFA/SLA.

**Question 7**

A quarter of respondents cited condition of the accommodation as the factor they liked least about living in SFA/SLA but small room sizes, allocation policies and inability to personalise their living space also attracted strong scores.

Question 8



“ Service accommodation could be better managed; investment now in green technology boilers would save on maintenance in the long run. Currently MHS only provide short term, low cost fixes, which cost more in the long run as they have more frequent visits for the same/similar faults. ”

“ I used to like SFA. When arriving at a new unit you could be safe in the knowledge that you would have good, clean, affordable housing to move into. This is no longer the case. ”

“ The strict adherence to entitlement is not flexible enough to accommodate the modern family. If you need more space and you're prepared to pay the additional rent you should be able to. ”

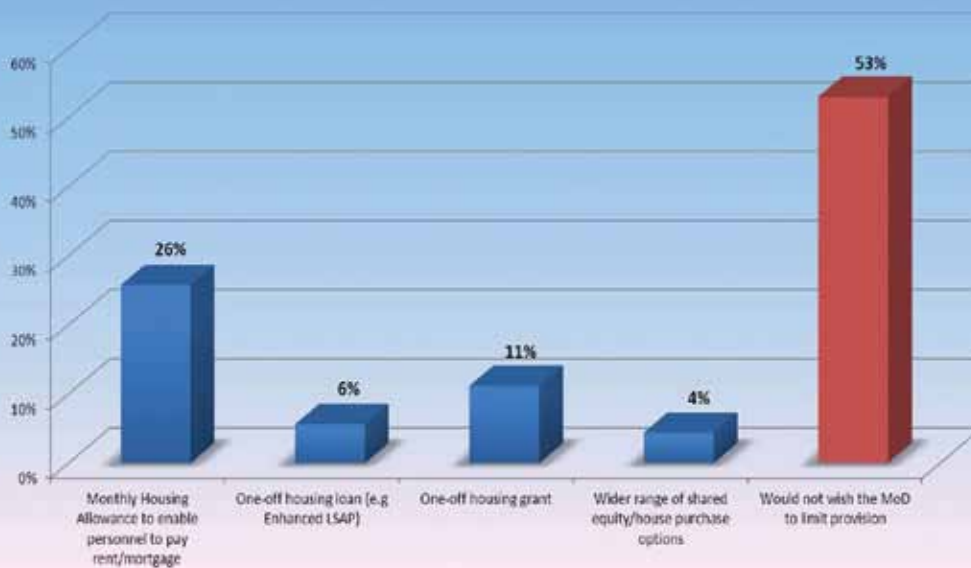
“ Service accommodation is fine, but the standards are rapidly decreasing. Allocation should be overseen by Service personnel to eliminate the 'civilian viewpoint' - they simply do not understand the pressures of Service life, but simply apply the rules steadfastly, with no flexibility. To obtain flexibility involves a drawn out process, which is stressful. ”

“ The biggest issue with SFA and SLA is the continuing inequity between the treatment of married and single personnel. It is in effect a hidden means of continuing the divisive married/single pay division which was abandoned (rightly) several decades ago. Such discrimination has no place in a modern fighting Service. This issue becomes increasingly apparent and inappropriate as a 'singly' grows older. While not such an issue perhaps at age 20, after a full career at age 50+ as a singly it is wholly inappropriate. ”

“ Current SFA is not large enough for a modern 2+2 family. My 14 year old son's bedroom barely has room for his bed and a cabinet. His chest of drawers for his clothes is in the wardrobe! ”

“ In my six years in the Service I have been allocated 18 rooms across 3 establishments. I have never had a phone line or satisfactory internet access, and have frequently experienced problems with damp/leaks and have had five winter months with no heating or hot water. Works services take months to change a light bulb. There is never enough parking nearby or storage space. Furniture is dilapidated and Service beds painfully uncomfortable. Accommodation is allocated on the basis of who moans most, rather than on an equitable basis. Why should someone who is married get a 3 bedroom house while I live in a grade 4 single room? At one former unit, personnel with dogs got allocated a house - I know of people who bought dogs just to move out of a room! Disturbance allowance doesn't even cover the cost of moving a phone line and flat-rate Removals doesn't cover the cost of van hire. It beggars belief, and I'm certainly not going to subject my (future) family to it; I'm leaving the Service. ”

**If the MoD were to limit provision of accommodation (both SFA and SLA), what provision should be made?**



Although more than half of respondents did not wish MoD to limit provision of accommodation, many were open to considering alternatives, with a monthly housing allowance the preferred option of those who voted.

**Question 9**

“ If personnel are forced to buy houses, then a TAX FREE grant (not loan) of 30% of the average UK house price should be provided. Chances are, personnel would settle in the preferred family location and you would have a large number of people living in the Mess/block during the week. This will reduce family cohesion; be a barrier to retention; and might be unaffordable if costs are increased. ”

“ SLA and SFA work very well. However a scheme should be thought up to help Service personnel/families get on the housing ladder more easily, with help for rent/mortgage, which could be applied in a way to help when postings come up and they have to move. ”

“ The ability to be accommodated by Service means is fundamental to military life. Reducing provision or removing entitlement is unacceptable and would destroy morale, Service before self would be a joke, as the Service isn't willing to support it's personnel. ”

“ To be fair to everyone, the Future Accommodation Policy should provide a monthly housing allowance, weighted to the housing costs in the local area, should be available to all, whether single, married or partnered to be spent on SFA/SLA or local civilian accommodation at the individual's discretion. At certain locations; isolated, outer islands, extreme rural, difficult terrain, costly cities (London, Edinburgh etc) a certain percentage of SLA/ SFA would have to be maintained. ”

“ To remove, cut or simply refuse to house Service personnel would in my opinion show that personnel are in fact the lowest element on the chain. Yes, we join voluntarily knowing that we will be subject to frequent moves, time away from friends and family and be expected to work when the Service requires us. In return, we expect the Service to house us when IT moves US to where we are needed most. ”

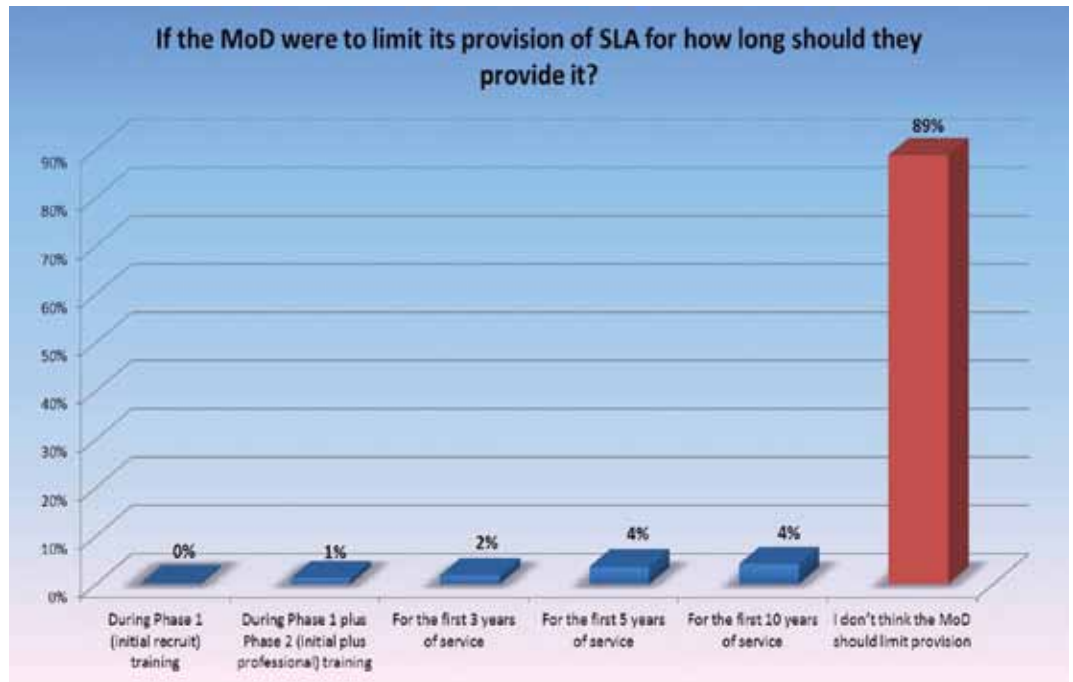
“ The idea of forcing people out of SFA/SLA is inconceivable! I would much prefer an enhanced LSAP or grant to enable me to move out of SFA. I can manage the mortgage, but not that initial deposit to actually get a foot on the ladder. ”

“ Service personnel have no location choice and many would not be able to or wish to purchase in certain areas. Who would cover any negative equity when it came time to sell the house on posting? AFPRB currently abate the military pay because of the 'low' cost of housing. Any removal of SFA would need to see a concurrent increase in pay. What will the RAF do if someone cannot afford either to buy or pay market rent rates? ”

“ Whilst I believe we should encourage personnel to become less dependent on the Service to provide accommodation, any system needs to be robust enough to cater for the vast differences in property prices, rental charges etc. around the country. ”

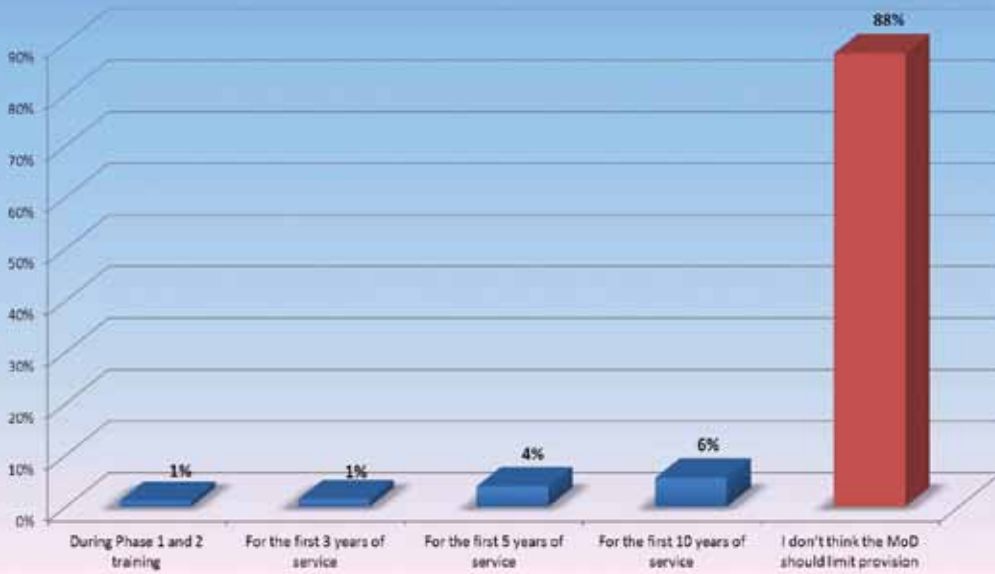
There was an overwhelming vote against limiting the provision of SLA. The minority who considered a form of limited provision opined it should be retained for at least the first 5 years of service.

#### Question 10



- “ Provision for new members of the Services should be available. 10 years is a reasonable time period - less would not allow individuals to complete training and their first operational tour in SLA, which would be undesirable. ”
- “ Limiting public accommodation would need to come with a corresponding increase in geographical stability for Service personnel and a better relocation/allowance package when moves are generated for Service need. MoD would also need to consider how it reconciles the considerable difference in the cost of housing across the country with non-voluntary postings. ”
- “ To be honest I do not feel that there will be that much impact, recent closures, redundancies and already low morale, coupled with continuing OOA tours are already making people leave the RAF, and as such I doubt that there will be much of an RAF left in 10 years time! ”
- “ I think it would be a severe error of judgement on the MoD's part (more so than normal anyway) to limit the accommodation that we have. People can't afford to get on the housing market, and there is already a shortage of cheap affordable housing so if all of a sudden 130,000 plus (across all 3 Services) people are made homeless because of the MoD's policy. How in hell are they to survive? ”

**If the MoD were to limit its provision of SFA for how long should they provide it?**



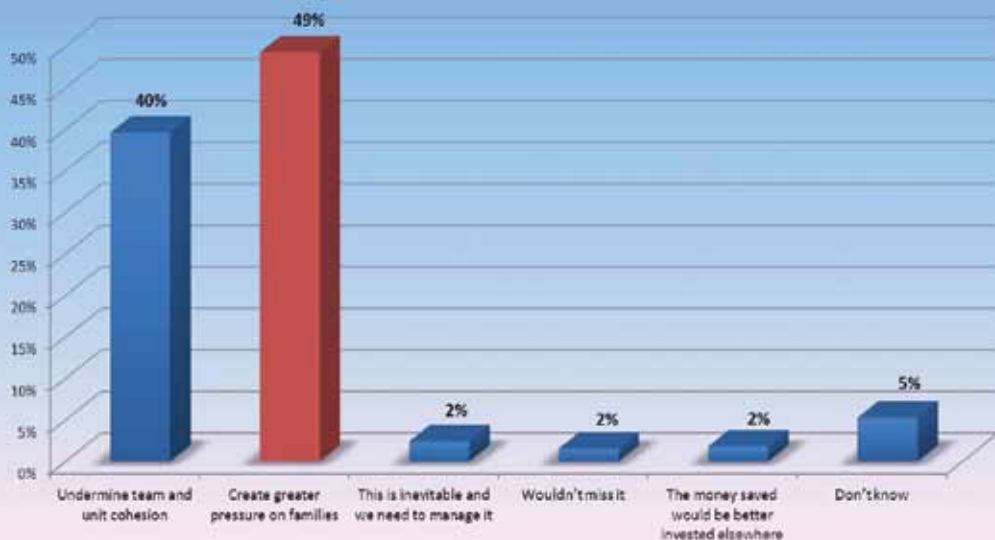
Another big vote against MoD limiting the provision of SFA, with small minorities considering its provision for only initial periods of service.

**Question 11**

- “ Provision of SFA is a luxury UK Defence cannot afford, but a perk which will be strongly defended. ”
- “ I don't think the MoD should limit the provision of SFA precisely because I am posted at the behest of MoD to areas I would not choose. ”
- “ The RAF moves families around without much thought for the individual or family. If the SFA were not available, it would leave uncertainty and extra stress. SFA is the comfort blanket to allow the posting system to function. ”
- “ Significantly reducing the provision of SLA and SFA will only work if a model similar to the Dutch one is adopted - Temporary (6 mths) single and family accommodation made available for in-coming personnel. Within this time the individual(s) are expected to find accommodation within the community, which will become their permanent living arrangement; however, personnel are usually employed at a station/unit in excess of 10 years. ”

- “ Having spoken to colleagues, removing SLA would be an impossible situation for singlies. Young SAC's living in flats they have to furnish and maintain would erode the already diminishing ethos and values of the RAF. ”
- “ If provision of SLA is to be significantly reduced then the MoD/RAF could no longer expect its personnel to be mobile and move every 2-3 years. I've moved 8 times in 5 years. ”
- “ To significantly reduce SLA in the next 10 years would put a lot of financial strain on personnel, particularly junior ranks. It is well known that the housing/rent market is expensive and first time buyers are finding it hard to save enough for a deposit and it doesn't appear it will become any easier soon. ”

**If the provision of SLA were to reduce significantly in 10 years time, along with the associated community support facilities, how would you describe the impact?**

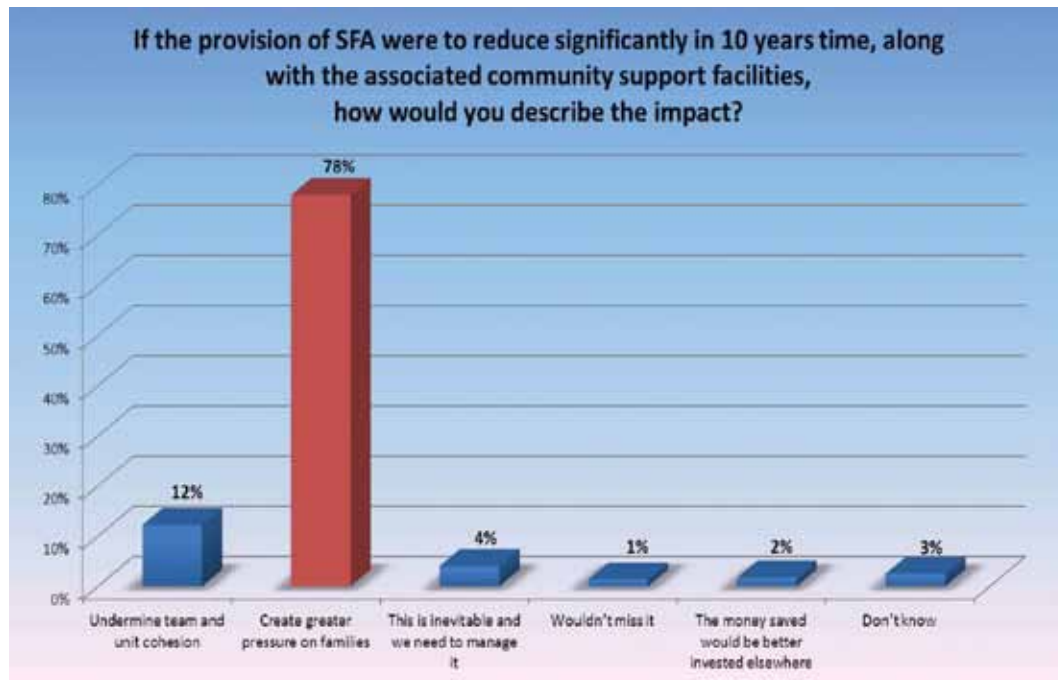


Almost half of voters felt that a reduction in SLA and associated community facilities would create pressure on families and a further 40% felt it would undermine cohesion.

**Question 12**

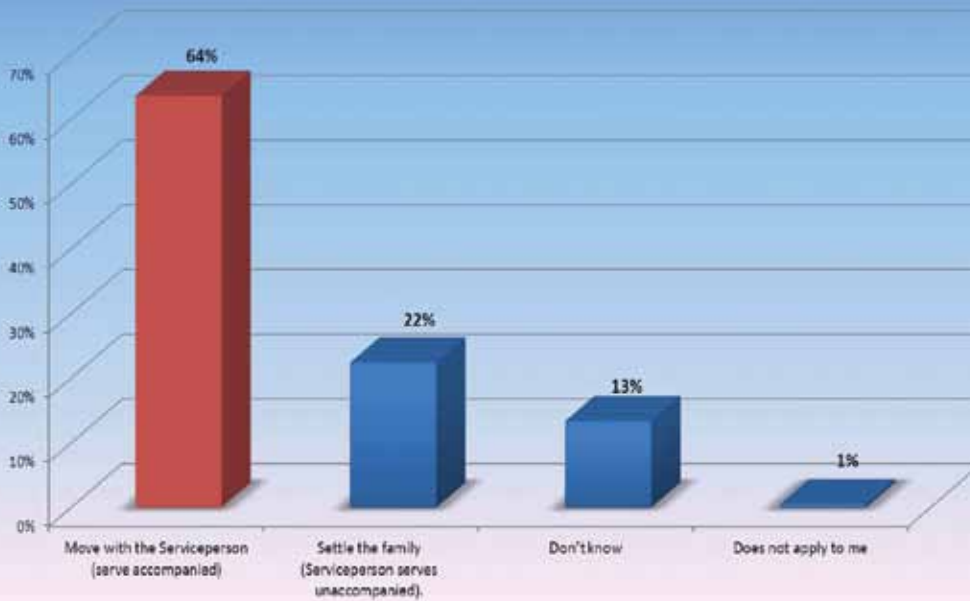
More than three quarters of our voters felt that a reduction in SFA would create pressure on families, with a further 12% stating it would undermine cohesion.

Question 13



- “ There are many reasons to maintain both SLA and SFA, not just those above. The benefit of a support network available by either living in the Mess/barracks or Service neighbourhood cannot be overstated. With a huge increase in the amount of time spent overseas by an increasingly small force, Service families rely on collocated friends and families to help them through tough times. ”
- “ Not providing housing in the area where spouses were posted would split up families, force children to live in uncertain single parent families and become estranged from their serving parent. It would increase significantly the rate of divorce amongst families with a serving parent. It would result in personnel leaving the military to remain with their family, which would leave the military staffed with a short-term, uncommitted workforce. ”
- “ SFA is a very important incentive to remain serving for many people. It enables new families to adjust to Service life amongst people in similar situations. ”
- “ The idea to reduce the provision of SFA/SLA is totally against the ethos of the RAF. The idea of a unit living and working together on base is what makes the military and creates the spirit of Service life. ”
- “ I recognise that the current system of providing government owned housing estates is difficult, although I also think Defence Estates don't help themselves much. However, if the system is to be changed the Government needs to recognise that Service life is very different to other jobs and must recognise this is providing the total package needed to recruit and retain Service people. ”
- “ I am frankly outraged that there is even suggestion of limiting the provision of accommodation to both single and married personnel. The current operational tempo puts incredible pressure on Service families, and the suggestion that families should be 'split' on a semi-permanent basis is in my opinion unacceptable and would undoubtedly lead to a number of personnel leaving the Service. ”

**Given the choice, would you prefer to:**



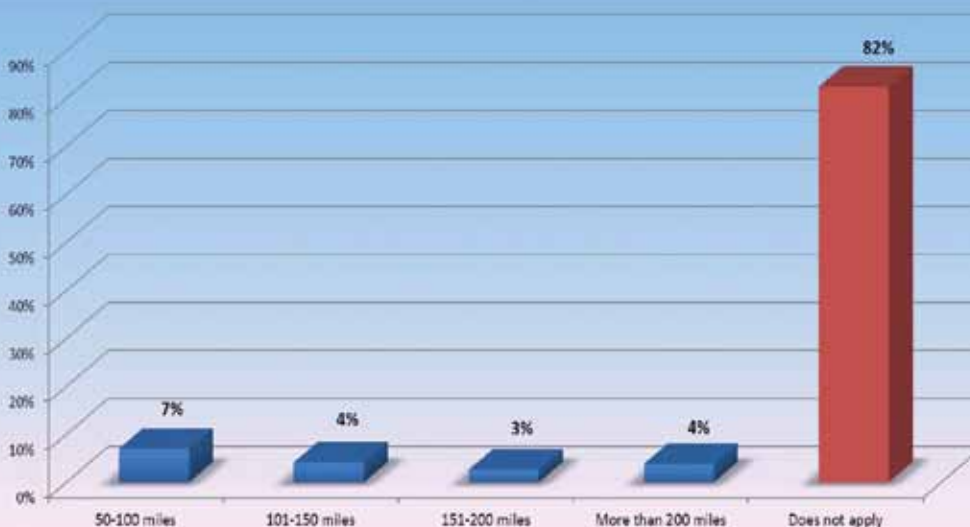
An overwhelming majority of our respondents would opt to serve accompanied, but almost a quarter said they would prefer to settle the family.

Question 14

- “ We married 16 years ago and have always lived together apart from detachments, we don't want to live apart. ”
- “ Military family life leads families to choose the best of a bad selection of choices: having children; spouse employment; schooling and whether as a couple you live apart or whether you legally abandon your children to boarding school. The choices are horrible. ”
- “ Neither of these apply because with both serve. We cannot settle the family and be unaccompanied and often we cannot be accompanied either. ”
- “ If a Serviceperson is serving unaccompanied through choice, it is different from, and should not be compared with, someone who may have to serve unaccompanied because of a lack of available SFA. ”
- “ I have no wish to serve unaccompanied and my family accept the requirement to be mobile, which is why we shall soon be moving to our 9th SFA in 16 years. It is worth remembering that my wife sacrificed her career in order to meet the principle of family mobility and the effect on our earning power. ”
- “ One day we would like to own our own home but as a family we prefer to stay together and experience living in different areas alongside other Service families. This is important to us when my husband is deployed. ”

- “ My daily commute is 35 miles each way. In my previous role, it was a weekly commute of 135 miles each way. ”
- “ I commute daily between my own property and current Unit, a round trip of 90 miles per day. ”

**If you, or the serving member of your family, lives away because of an assignment, how far do you/they have to travel each way to your family home?**

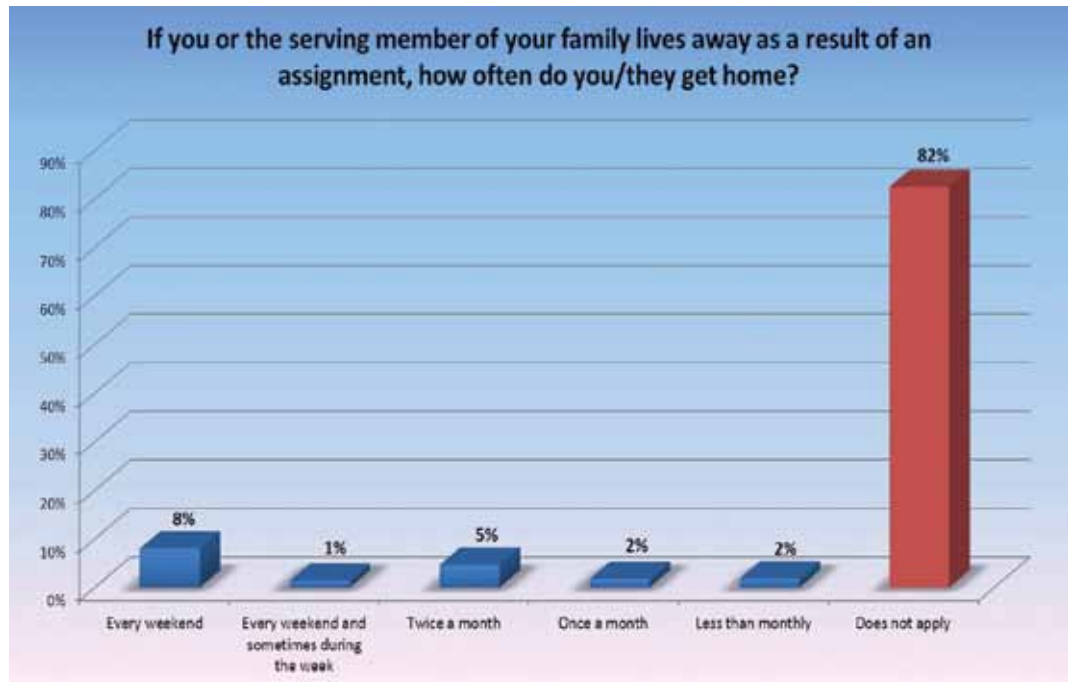


18% of our respondents commute between 50 and 200 miles to their family home.

Question 15

8% of our respondents said they managed to get home every weekend but a worrying 4% only get home once a month or less.

Question 16



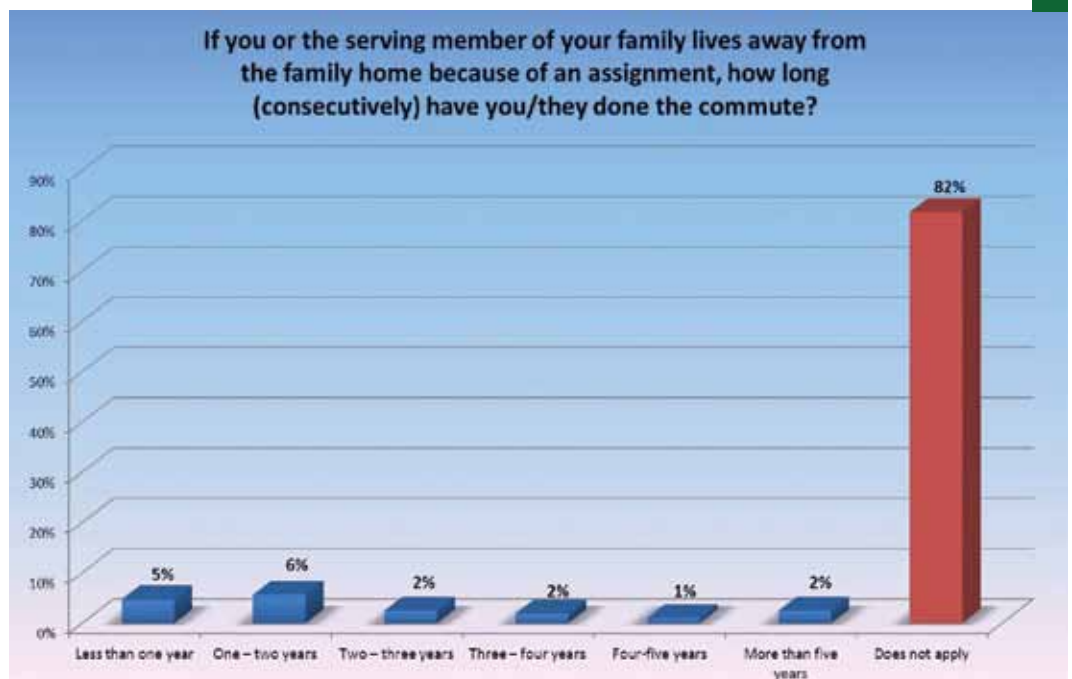
“ I have lived in SLA whilst awaiting an SFA, this was for approx 6 months when I travelled over 100 miles each weekend when not on duty. ”

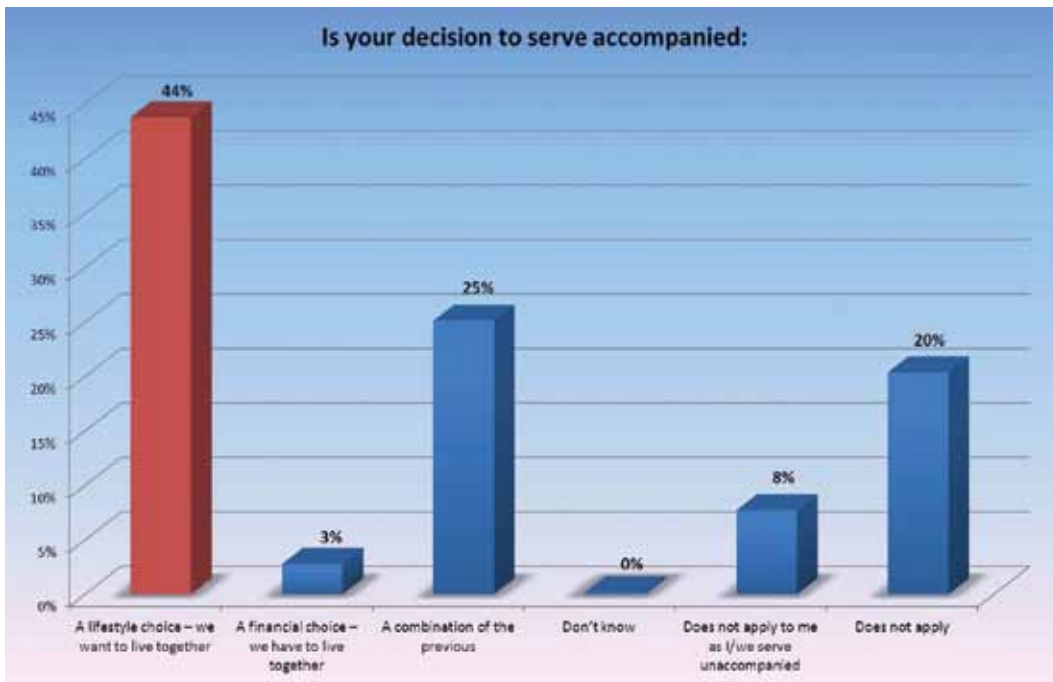
“ I commute 50 miles per day to/from SFA and have done so for more than 2 years. Unavailability of suitable SFA at my current unit is at critical levels with more personnel being posted in on additional new formations further exacerbating this situation. ”

“ We have owned our own property for 12 years since children started school, we have had numerous separations and experienced different situations ie. him being away 3 years but home every weekend and him away for 2 years where he was away for 8 weeks at a time then home for 2 weeks. ”

Although most of our respondents do not commute, 5% have been commuting between a family home and parent unit for at least 2 years and a minority for more than 5 years.

Question 17





Almost half of our respondents indicated that they wished to live together as a lifestyle rather than a financial choice albeit a quarter said their decision was a combination of the two.

Question 18

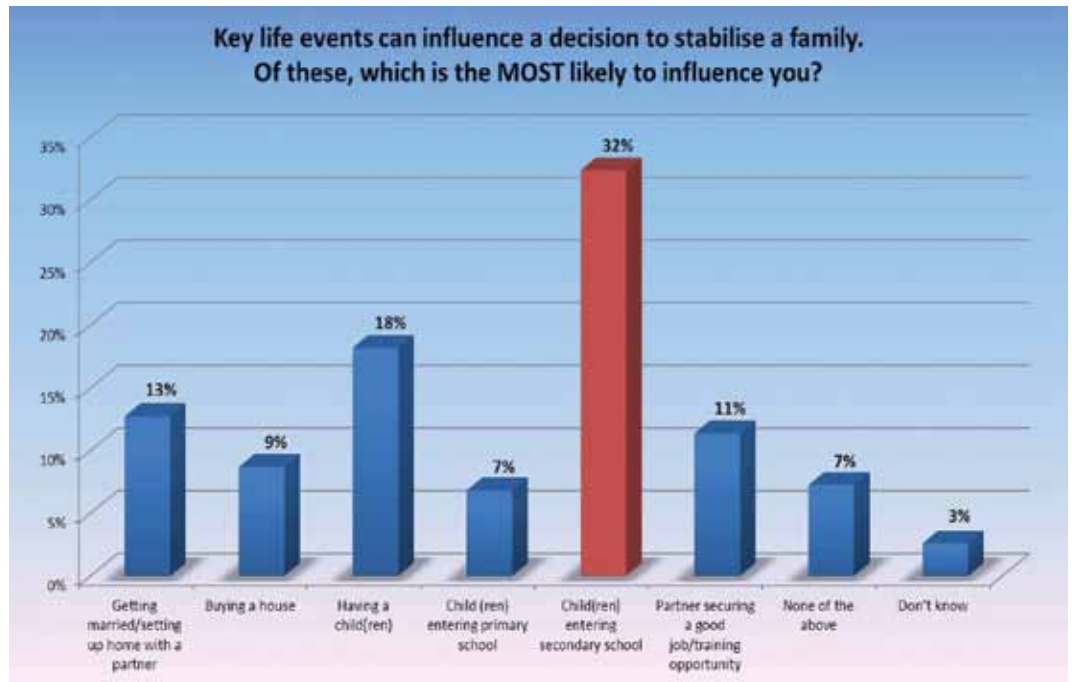
“ Question is ludicrous, living as a family is not a ‘lifestyle’ choice. I didn’t get married to shunt my family to one end of the country whilst I work at the other and only see them once every 3 weeks, and yes, I did that for 18 months to provide my son with time to complete his highers. We live together as a family unit to support each other, as families do! ”

“ The take-up of SFA must prove that people would rather have high mobility and live as a family as opposed to living married unaccompanied. This would be an unacceptable and my husband would leave the RAF if this ever came to pass. ”

“ We have just taken the decision to move my wife and children back to our house and for me to live in the block. This has also made me decide to leave the RAF at the nearest opportunity as I do not want to spend most of my childrens’ lives only seeing them once a month. ”

Most cited a child starting secondary school as the main reason for stabilising a family. The partner securing a good job/training opportunity attracted 11% of the votes, indicating second incomes and careers as important stabilising factors.

Question 19

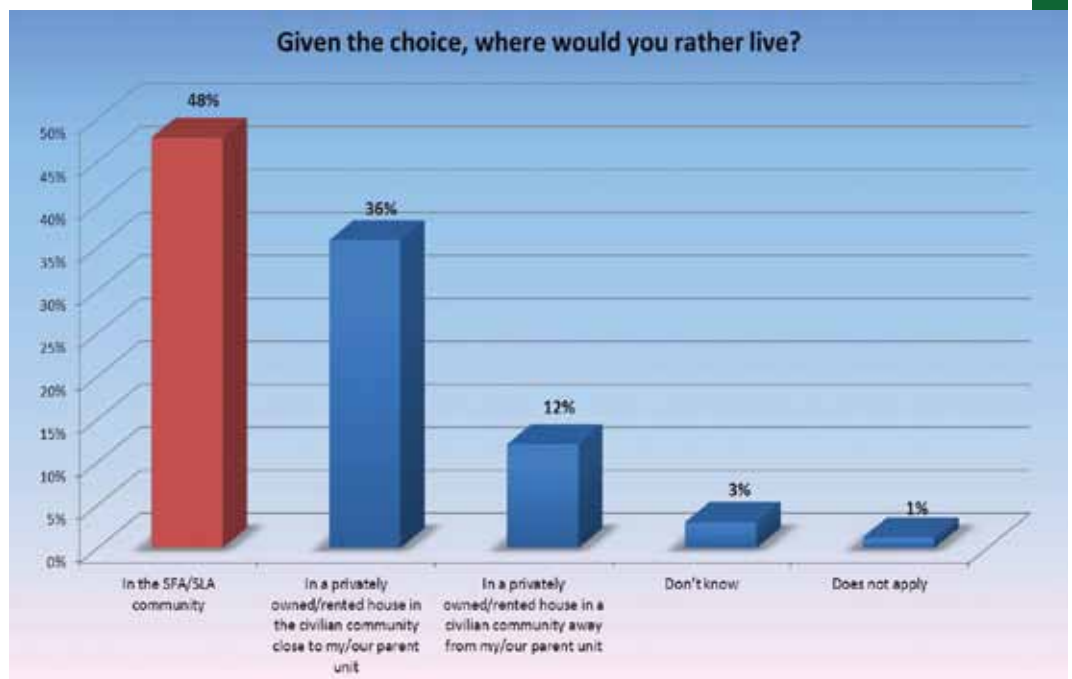


- “ This depends entirely on the age of children. Little ones are easily mobile - things get harder and more complicated as they grow up, they need continuity. ”
- “ Being part of a couple with no children, I would not like to be separated from my spouse during the week. Moving has had a devastating effect on my civilian career and future pension. ”
- “ School exams would affect my choices more, it's a time moving a family causes greater disruption. For me, if the MoD/Service were to give me a grant towards buying a house I would gladly accept it. ”
- “ As a family we chose to give our children stability but they have grown up angry at their father for being away so much, he has missed out but has been able to attend most of the important celebrations. We may never know whether we made the right decision but we have survived and have asked for nothing from the RAF. ”

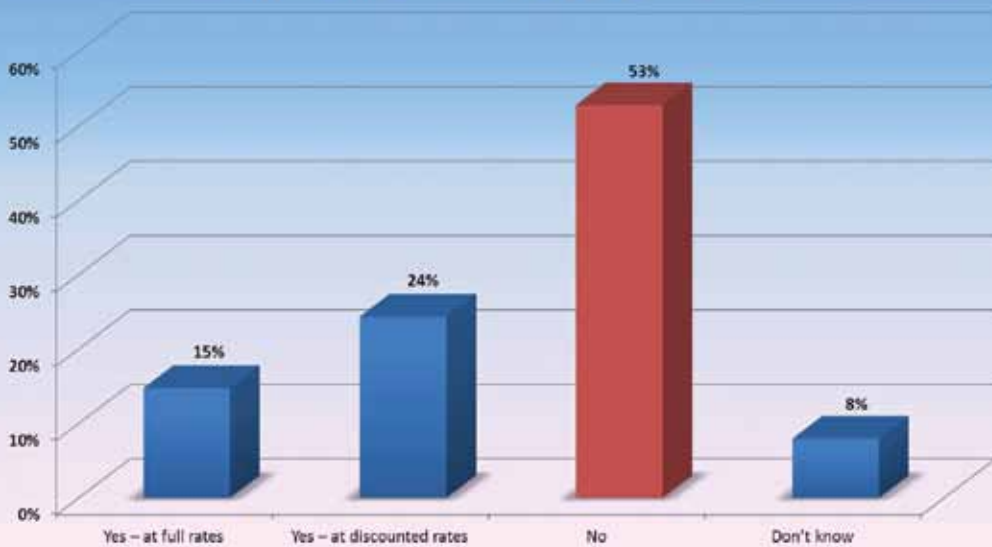
- “ I don't think those who want to remove the Forces housing understand the community life it brings. When you are posted you are certain that you will make friends with people of a similar background who understand. ”
- “ I believe that the current arrangement of providing SFA or SFA (or in extremis SSSA) should be maintained over providing Service personnel the means to gain private accommodation. ”
- “ Stability may not be the initial driver behind family location. It is often in the latter part of the career that this becomes an issue, when schooling and perhaps post Service employment become more of a consideration. ”

Almost half our respondents expressed a desire to live in the SFA/SLA community and a further 36% wanted to live close to the parent unit, indicating a strong pull to live close to the RAF.

Question 20



**A single Serviceperson who owns/rents a property, but occupies SLA during the week, has to pay for their accommodation. A married Serviceperson, serving unaccompanied, does not. Should they?**



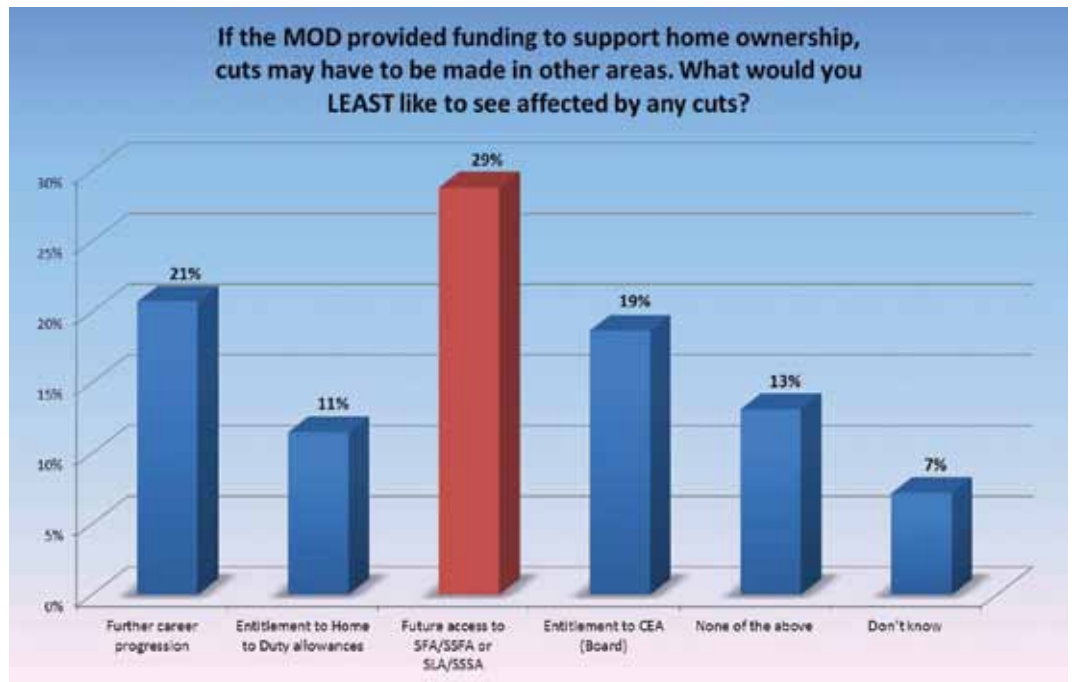
This question, posed by the Future Accommodation Project (FAP) team, attracted significant comment and would probably benefit from further analysis between votes cast by married personnel and single.

Question 21

- “ It is fully time that the discrimination against single Service personnel, particularly with regard to accommodation and allowances, ceases completely. It is highly discriminatory that solely by reason of marriage anyone should receive rebated or free, food or accommodation where the same conditions are not permitted to a single person, particularly where marrieds occupy suites (Mon to Thu night) and singlies, who have their whole life accoutrements with them, are crammed into a single room. ”
- “ This is a question that needs to be broken down further. There is a difference between a married unaccompanied for Service reasons and a married unaccompanied by choice; the latter should still get a rebate on the SLA charge, but not to the level of those unaccompanied for Service reasons. ”
- “ A single person has a much clearer choice about owning a home and occupying SLA during the week, however, in many cases a married Service person has their choice taken away from them due to circumstances around family life and therefore adding greater financial pressure would be wrong. ”
- “ Payment for SLA if unaccompanied should depend on if they are VOLSEP or not. ”
- “ Part of the military covenant is to provide suitable accommodation. The Service ethos is underpinned through our military communities. In my view any further attempt to reduce SFA provision will adversely affect morale and make the military even less attractive to future generations. ”

Again, this question drew strong comment, with some opining that this indicated decisions had already been made and further cuts were due. Future access to SFA/SLA was an entitlement almost 30% of our respondents wished to retain.

Question 22



“ CEA will be fiercely defended by those in receipt of it, certainly understandably so, and just perhaps rightly so. However, it is an expense which is certainly a perk, which Defence simply cannot afford. ”

“ We choose to accompany the Service person as we wish to live together as a family and enjoy living in the Service community. Our eldest son is starting Boarding School soon and this is a result of the regular moves. He wants to go to boarding school and we want to still live as a family. SFA and CEA are two crucial entitlements of being a Service family. ”

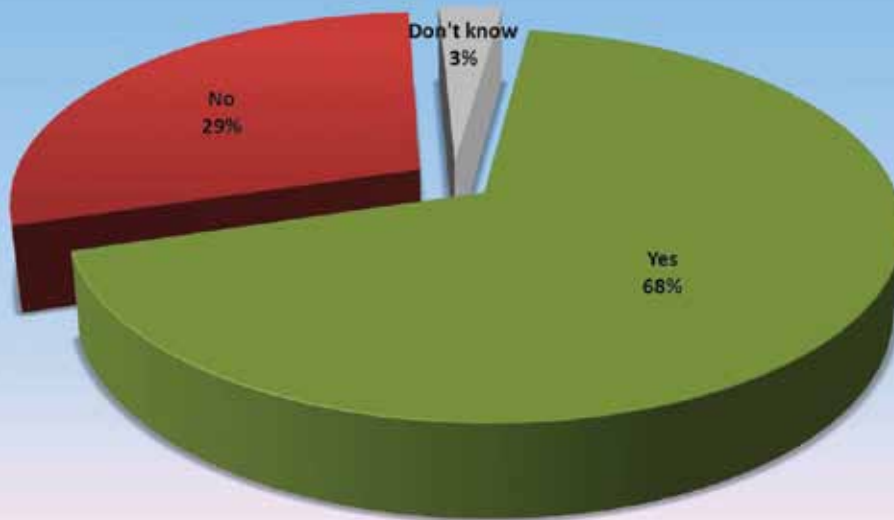
“ I would like to see the end of SFA altogether for those in established relationships and children of school age. Generally, the combination of those two key factors ‘triggers’ the requirement to buy, and invariably in an area near to existing family ties. At this stage an appropriate scheme needs to be provided, which is tied to an equally appropriate return of Service, to allow Service Personnel the opportunity to break away from the very easy reliance on SFA that can be created. ”

“ The MoD has in the past encouraged personnel to stabilise their family, with the Get You Home package, we used to pay an abated food charge. This has now been taken away. Now my family is stable. If the MoD takes away any more of my allowances I will consider my position. Why should I stay and work for an organisation which has no loyalty to myself and my family, yet demands it in return? ”

“ Stopping career progression for a house? ...REALLY? ”

“ If the MoD could provide me with a career that enabled me to remain settled (without it affecting promotion) I would have no issue in sending my child to a local school. ”

**Do you feel that marital status should continue to be a deciding factor in future accommodation allocation policies?**



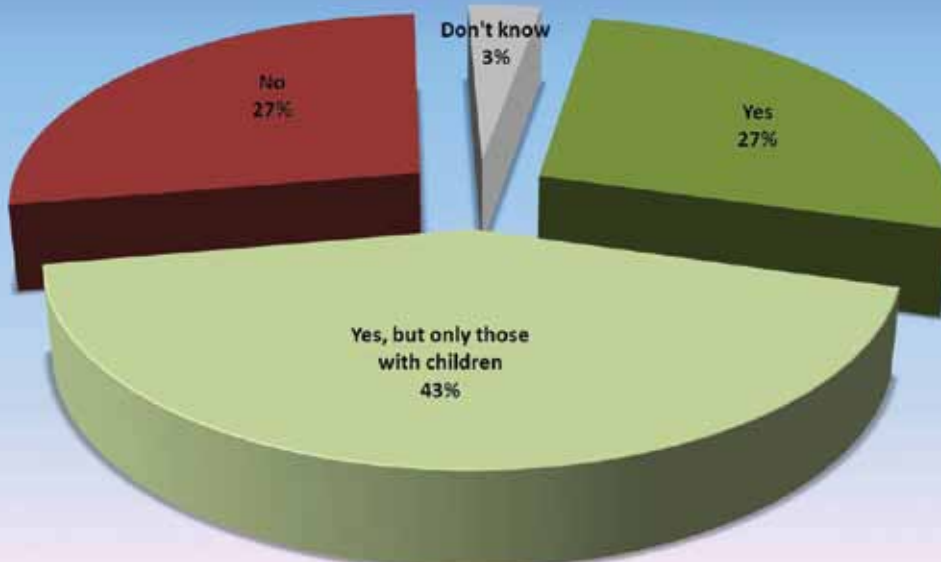
A strong majority of respondents felt that marital status should be a factor in determining entitlement to accommodation but this top level result would probably benefit from further analysis by marital status and age of respondent.

Question 23

- “ I feel marital status should continue to be a deciding factor in future allocation policies. This may seem old fashioned, but marriage is evidence of significant commitment and strong marriages are good for the Service. I wouldn't have got where I am without my wife's support, and the RAF would not have benefited from her loyalty through all the typical voluntary stn activities. ”
- “ Some people don't believe in marriage. In this case, are we not effectively discriminating against their beliefs if we refuse to accommodate their long-term partner and children but are prepared to recognise gay couples and house them. Society has changed, the Service must change too. ”
- “ Policy encourages couples to get married, in some cases too soon, so they can get a quarter. In my view this contributes to the high divorce rate within the Services. ”

- “ I think it is crucial that unmarried couples with children are entitled to SFA. Not to do so creates an unstable environment for children and they will miss out on residing with either their mother or father. ”
- “ In modern life it is common to live with a partner, I would like to see the SFA allocation criteria reflect this. ”
- “ The issue of unmarried/divorced couples is an emotive one but with the already serious lack of housing, the line must be drawn somewhere. ”
- “ Unmarried couples should not be entitled to SFA. ”

**Should future accommodation policies recognise unmarried partners?**

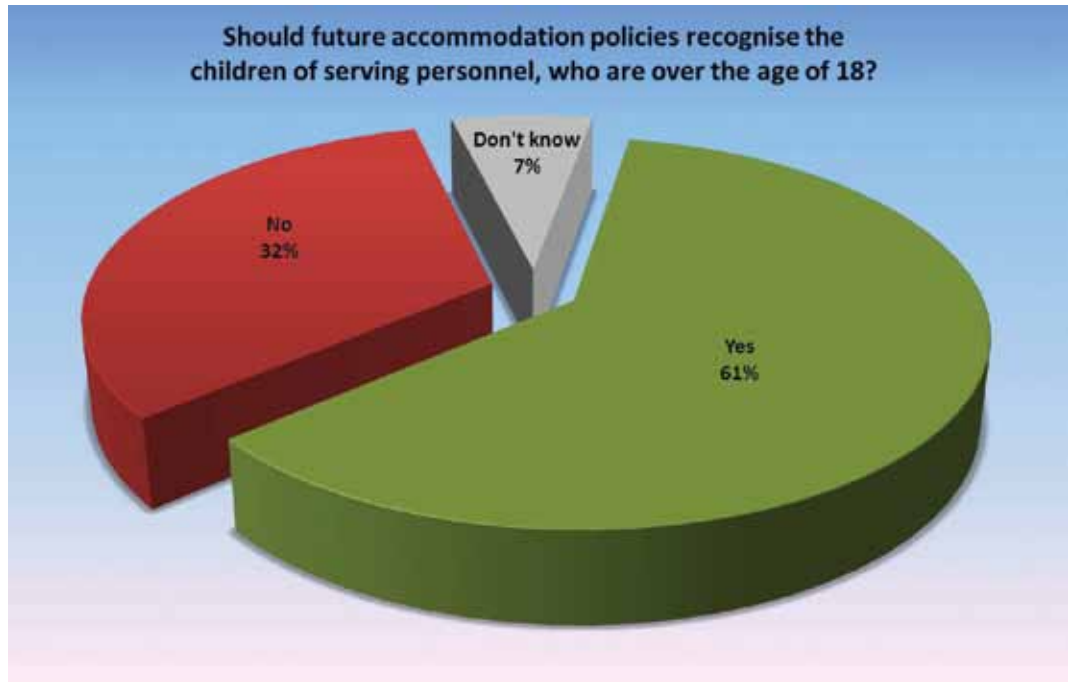


Despite the vote above, the vast majority (70%) voted to recognise unmarried partners in future accommodation policies, with 43% voting to recognise those with children.

Question 24

A majority of voters felt that young adults should be recognised in future accommodation policies.

Question 25

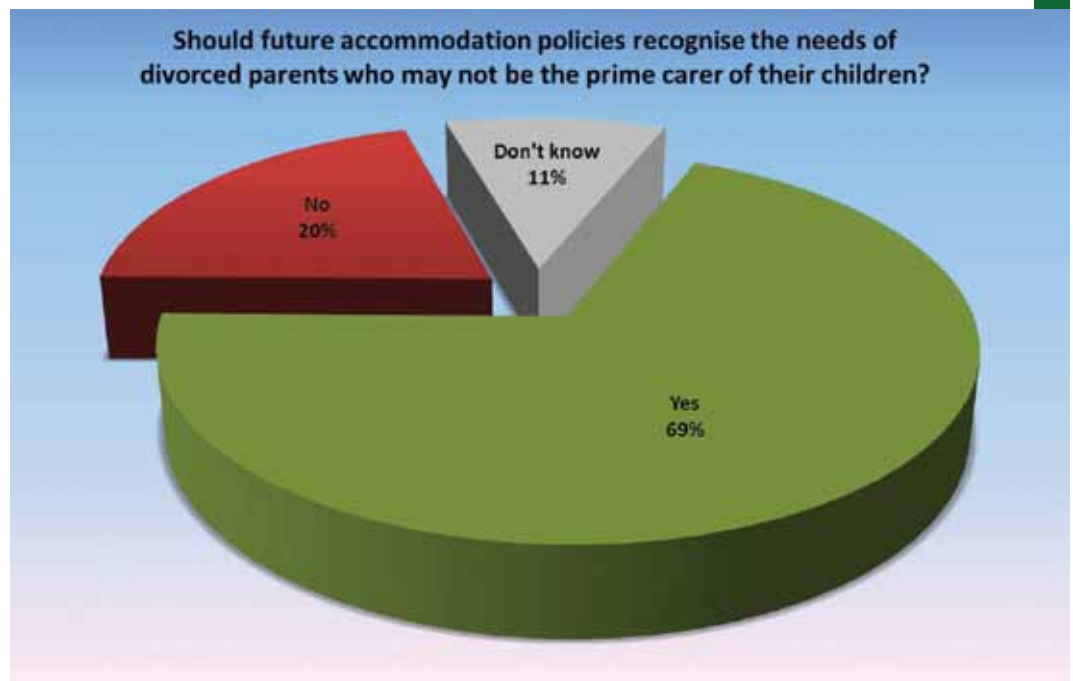


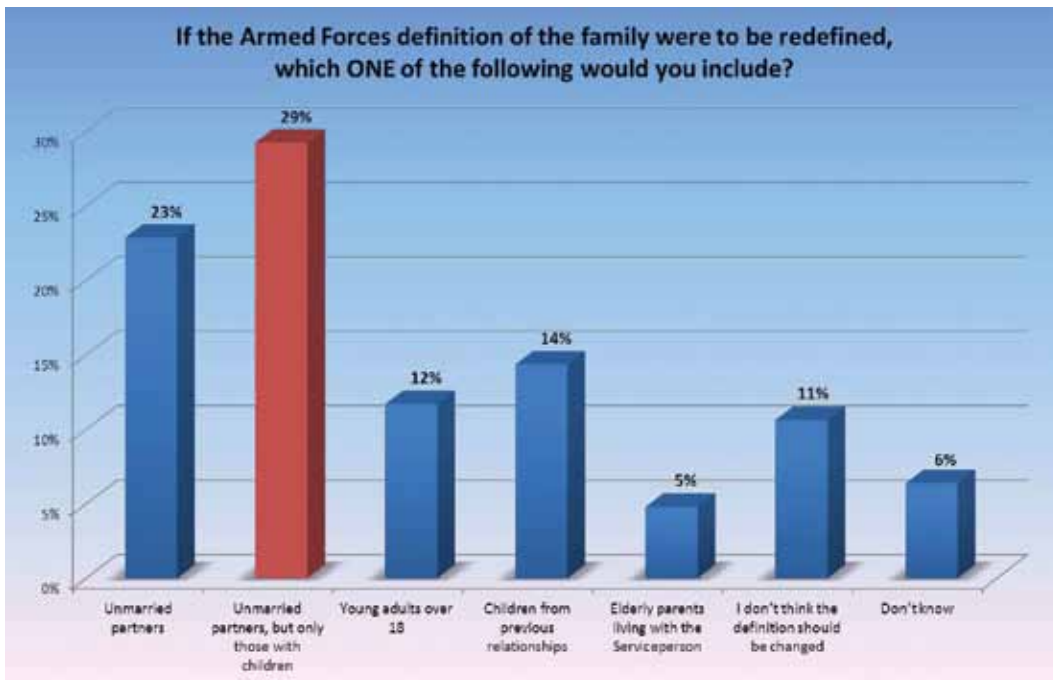
- “ Although the parent in me says that the kids should all have left home at 18 and gotten their own job (wishful thinking I know) at the moment this isn't the case and it is increasingly harder for people to find jobs that will pay enough to support renting somewhere. ”
- “ Children over the age of 18 (providing they have never left home) should absolutely be recognised in future policies as it is difficult for young people to afford their own accommodation. ”
- “ Children over 18 should only be considered if they have a physical, mental or learning disability and therefore need to live within the family. Others are old enough to look after themselves. ”

- “ I am the child of a divorced family. We visited Dad once a week. We were perfectly happy sharing an airbed or camping in the garden. To provide a room for occasional visits - even school holidays seems a little extreme. ”
- “ As a divorced father I paid full food and accommodation charges to live in the Mess, any 'get you home' payments stopped, but my children still existed. Yet a single person who owns their own property gets paid to visit that property twice a month. ”
- “ Divorced parents with children need to be afforded more options than occasional use of a Welfare House. ”

Almost 70% of voters felt that divorced parents should be recognised in accommodation policies, even if not the prime carer of the child(ren).

Question 26



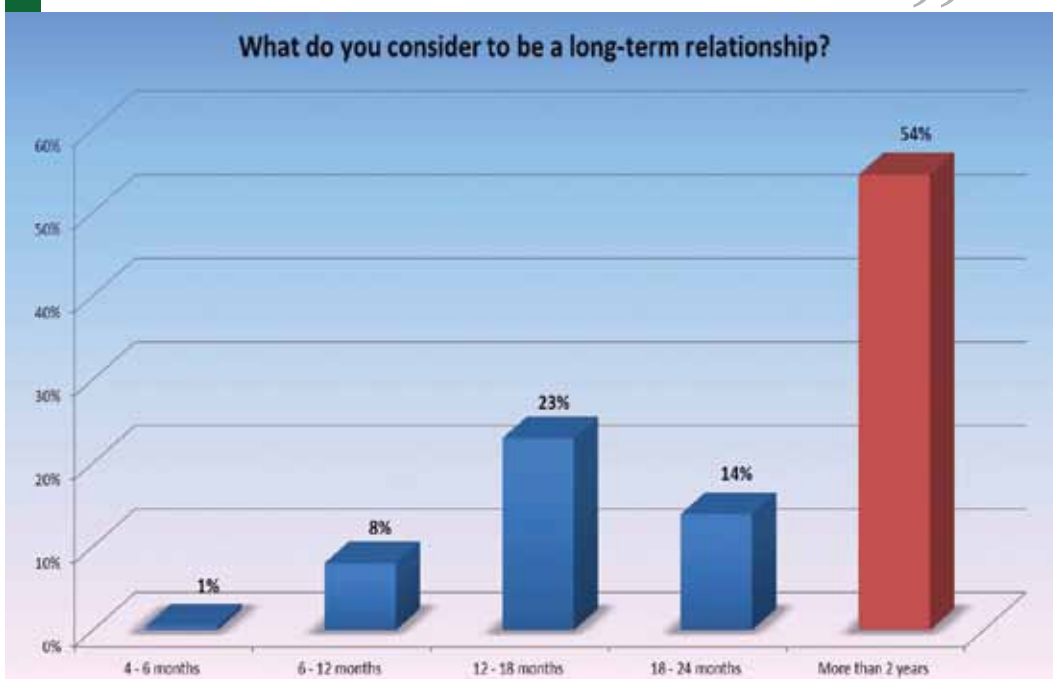


In line with the votes at Question 26, the majority (29%) felt that unmarried partners with children should be recognised, with a further 23% recognising unmarried couples parents even if they did not have children. It is of note that 11% did not wish to amend the definition of family at all.

Question 27

- “ The real issue is not to re-define ‘family’, but to give all Service personnel the same rights irrespective of their individual lifestyle choices, specifically: to be married, divorced or single. ”
- “ Many in the civilian communities remain living with their parents until their late 20’s, so Service children can be even more disadvantaged. A Service child suffers from a disrupted education and then they are expected to find a job with the remuneration to provide for themselves. ”
- “ The system is quite fair. However, I do feel personnel who are not married but have children should be considered. ”
- “ We should have moved beyond the traditional family concept and recognise the many different families. ”

- “ I think that couples in long-term relationships (over 2 years) or those with children should be defined as a family for the purposes of obtaining SFA. ”
- “ Long-term is a personal perception. The most important factor is whether or not a couple consider themselves in a long-term relationship or not. Not the Service. ”
- “ Long-term couples should be considered in the same way as married couples - the current system only serves to separate unmarried parents, turning the main carer into a single parent. ”

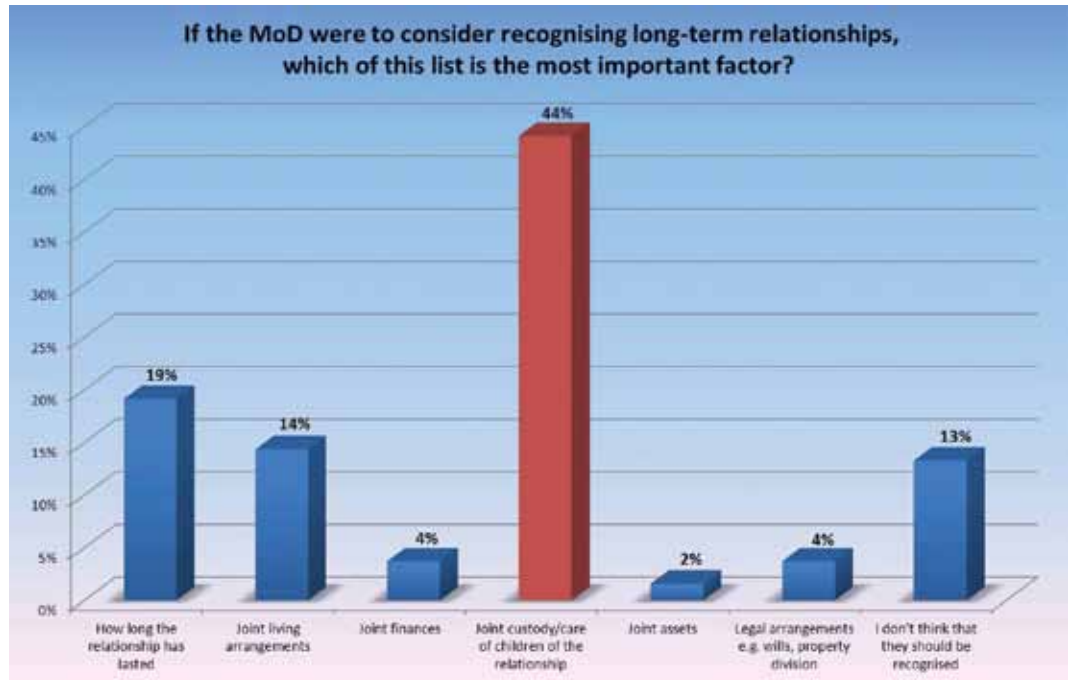


More than half of our respondents felt that a long-term relationship should have lasted at least 2 years before recognition by the MoD, with a further 37% saying it should have lasted 12-24 months. Again, an interesting result that would benefit from analysis by age, marital status and gender.

Question 28

The majority vote for factors to be considered in recognition of long-term relationships was the care and custody of any children.

Question 29



“ HMRC recognise our 11 year relationship and therefore count my income as joint. This means we get no Tax Credits and are about to lose Child Benefit. Yet the MoD fails to recognise our status, I’m classed as single and have no access to the benefits a married Service person has. ”

“ I’ve gone for length of time in a relationship as not all couples choose to have joint assets. That said, maybe the alternative would be to allow those engaged to benefit from housing. ”

“ I feel that if a couple is committed enough to have children then they should be entitled to a house. ”

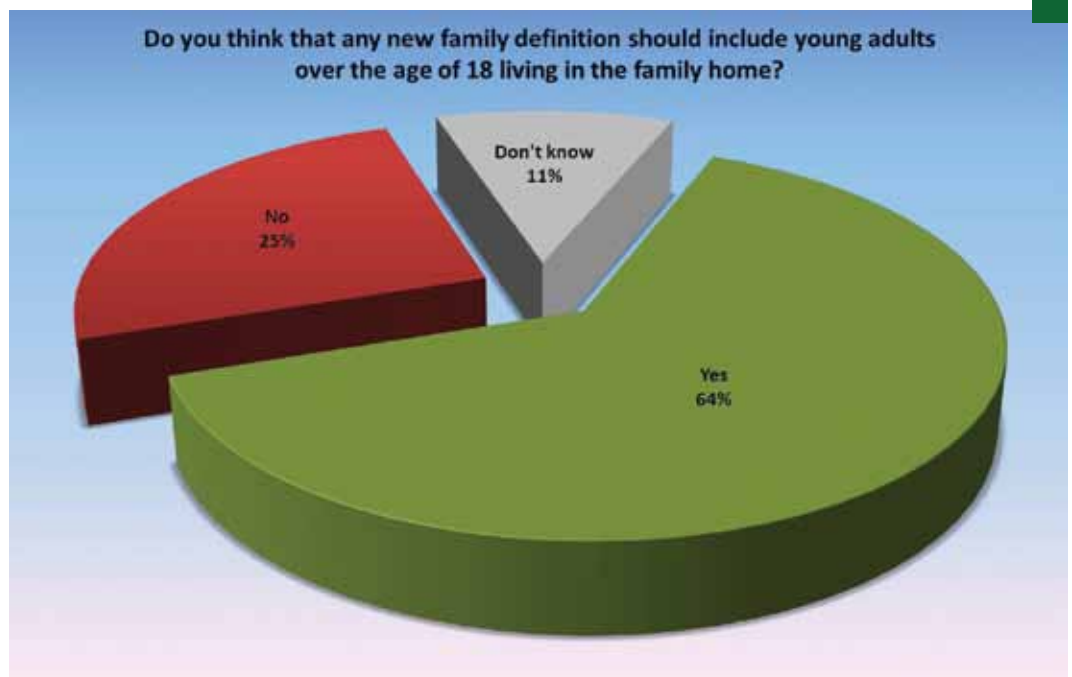
“ My eldest of four children is 19. When we are posted next, he will no longer be entitled to reside in SFA. This is divisive and flies in the face of the ethos that SFA is for married family units, which the MoD allegedly supports. Am I to make him homeless? ”

“ Young adults over the age of 18 should be taking more decisions for their future and not depending on their parents. ”

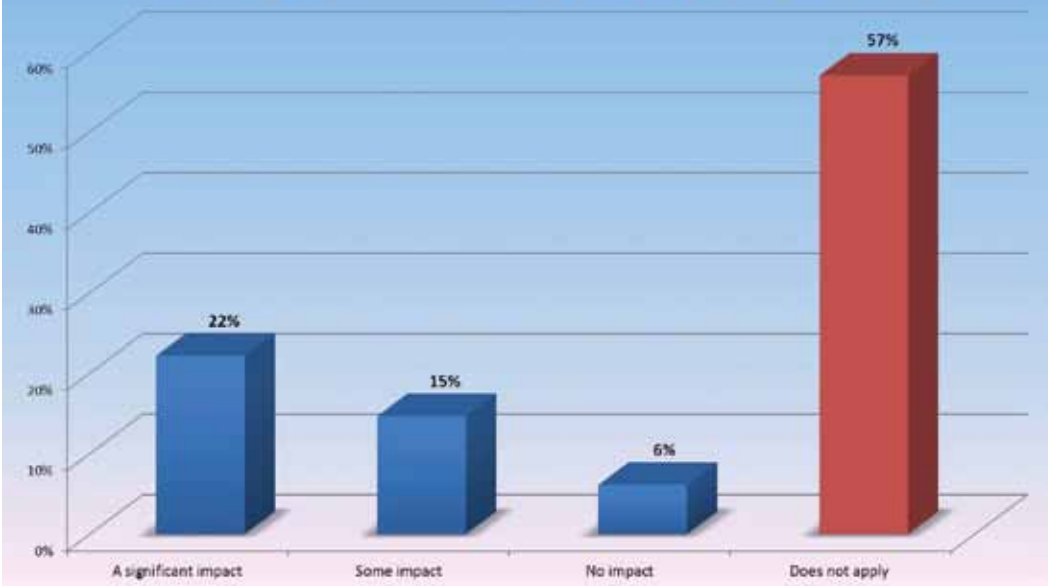
“ There are very few 18 year olds who could afford to move out of home in this day and age, why should Forces kids be any different? ”

In line with the vote on accommodation policies, there was strong support for the inclusion of young adults in the future definition of family.

Question 30



**If you/the serving family member commute to your/their unit on a weekly basis, what impact does this have on family life and relationships?**



This question, linked to earlier commuting questions, attracted considerable comment about the negative impact of commuting on family life and relationships.

**Question 31**

“ I have found that protracted separation degrades family life: you have neither the stability of home life nor the benefits of belonging to the Service community at work. ”

“ The distance from my home has caused considerable impact on my relationships with both my wife and children, I found that on average I had less than 24 hours quality time with my family from Friday evening to Sunday night. This led to me becoming a stranger in my own house. ”

“ I took my unaccompanied post to allow them uninterrupted final years in education, but I regret the time spent away now. ”

“ My husband feels he doesn't have a say in every day family decisions and he still doesn't feel that it's his home because he only comes back at weekends. ”



The logo features a circular emblem with a red center and a blue ring, positioned to the left of the text. The text is arranged in three lines: 'ROYAL AIR FORCE' in blue, 'Families' in red, and 'Federation' in red.

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