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A survey of thousands of houses used by Army, Royal Navy and RAF families has found a decline in standards compared to 13 years ago. The investigation was launched after the Ministry of Defence came under severe criticism two years ago for the condition of properties used by personnel.

Surveyors have since been asked to check around 44,000 Service Family Accommodation (SFA) properties in England and Wales, as well as thousands more overseas. Similar reports are planned for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

So far, 40,500 properties have been checked in England and Wales. The last similar report was carried out in 1996. The Ministry of Defence has confirmed there has been an increase in the number of homes falling into the Standard 4 category – the lowest standard possible – although they claim there are a maximum of 450 in this category.

The MoD points out that service personnel and their families are not forced to live in Standard 4 housing, although some choose to do so. The report claims nearly 90 per cent of properties now fall into Standard 1 and Standard 2 and therefore meet the Government's Decent Homes

Standard.

While 32 per cent are graded as Standard 1, around 57 per cent are classed as Standard 2. The report claims these statistics "broadly reverse" the figures from 1996. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Kevan Jones, said "From 2012 no families will have to live in properties at either of the two lowest Standards for Condition. We remain committed to housing our personnel in high quality accommodation and this survey will help us achieve that objective."