

## 4 Tier Grading

All Service Families Accommodation (SFA) is subject to a 4 Tier Grading system. Grading is reviewed every four years; or in-between if work has been completed on the property or at the request of the occupant. The accommodation charges you pay reflect the grade of the accommodation with Grade 1 attracting the highest charge and Grade 4 the lowest. This should not be confused with the Standard of Condition of a property which is assessed using different criteria.

If a quarter is rated Standard 1 for Condition (S1FC) it has been deemed to be of the highest level and would include a modern kitchen, shower, double glazing and other necessary requirements. AFF continue to canvas for more funding to upgrade properties to Standard 1 for Condition, however this does not necessarily mean that the property is Grade 1.

The grading of a property is used to establish the rent payable on the SFA. The grade is decided by a Board of Officers, consisting of personnel representing the chain of command and representation from Defence Housing Executive. The grade is decided by assessing one of each kind or type of property against set criteria. The Board will award points accordingly, a utility room scores two points whereas the lack of nearby facilities can score up to a maximum of minus five. The final score will define the grade awarded and therefore the accommodation charge. Grade 1 = 1 to 4 points, Grade 2 = 5 to 9 points, Grade 3 = 10 to 14 points and Grade 4 = 14 to 25 points. Lower points = higher rent.

A recently amended version of the regulations covering the grading board (JSP 464 part 4) was issued in July 2004, which changed some of the previously set criteria. Positive points are now awarded for three notable items, two additional points is the SFA has an en-suite, one point for an additional toilet (above scale) and two additional points for the provision of a utility room.

The last point has caused great concern for residents in Upavon, Wiltshire (as demonstrated in a letter featured in the December AFJ) when residents found that their properties had been "upgraded" to a Grade 2 following a routine Grading Board. Although the quarters had not had any work done to improve facilities, the newly amended Grading criteria were used and the area adjoining the kitchen was deemed to qualify as an utility room. Consequently the properties were awarded two extra points, placing the quarter into the Grade 2 rent category. As the occupants say "we are paying an extra £90 per month for what we already had and it falls far short of what you would expect of a utility room" AFF Note: this decision has now been reversed much to residents delight.

This is a perfect example of properties being up-graded because of a change in the grading criteria rather than due to improvements having been carried out. Add to this any increase from the Armed Forces Pay and Review Body (AFPRB) on accommodation charges and you can begin to understand why so many occupants feel dissatisfied with their current housing situation. We must continue to ask for better funding to bring housing in all locations up to an acceptable standard.