

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Defence Estate Rationalisation Update

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Andrew Robathan): The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), announced in October 2010, marked the start of the process of transforming Defence and identified the need for rationalisation of the Defence estate. This included the sale of surplus land and buildings and the delivery of associated running cost reductions. The Army Basing Plan announcement by the Secretary of State on 5 March 2013, enabling the return from Germany and implementation of Army 2020, indicated that there would be a further announcement concerning other changes elsewhere in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) estate across the UK.

Today I am providing an update to the House on the results of work to implement the SDSR's commitments on rationalisation and on unit relocations on the wider Defence estate. Service and civilian personnel at the affected locations will be briefed; we will also engage with the Trades Unions where appropriate. This work will now be taken forward into detailed planning.

Lightning II Aircraft Basing at RAF Marham

Our first two Lightning II aircraft (Joint Strike Fighter) are currently participating in the US test programme and will remain in the US. We expect to receive frontline aircraft from 2015 onwards with an initial operating capability from land in 2018, followed by first of class flights from HMS Queen Elizabeth later that year.

I can now inform the House of the outcome of the further Basing Review recently undertaken in respect of the Lightning II aircraft.

Following the SDSR, a number of changes have occurred on the Defence estate that justified a further review of the basing options for Lightning II. This review has concluded that RAF Marham is the most appropriate Station for the Main Operating Base. Given that RAF

Lossiemouth will now host three squadrons of Typhoon and given the altered drawdown profile and Out of Service Date for Tornado (in line with the SDSR decision to concentrate our fast jet fleet on Typhoon and Lightning II), RAF Marham will have sufficient capacity for the basing of Lightning II, which will be operated jointly by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force. Further work will now be carried out to determine the precise investment requirements as the base transitions to support Lightning II.

Drawdown at RAF Leuchars

No. 1 (Fighter) Squadron and No 6 Squadron currently based at RAF Leuchars which provide the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) (Interceptor) North role will relocate to RAF Lossiemouth beginning summer 2014, with Typhoon flying operations ceasing at RAF Leuchars during autumn 2014, following a progressive transfer of the base from the RAF to the Army. The relocation of the Typhoons from RAF Leuchars will affect 347 Service personnel who will transfer from RAF Leuchars to RAF Lossiemouth, it will also affect 148 civilian staff.

No. 6 RAF Force Protection (FP) Wing Headquarters and No 58 Squadron RAF Regiment, both based at RAF Leuchars, will be disestablished, with the personnel in No. 6 RAF FP Wing Headquarters and No 58 Squadron RAF Regiment being reassigned during spring 2014. The future of the Squadron number plate is yet to be determined. This will affect 183 military posts. Those personnel will be reassigned to other RAF Force Protection tasks across the UK.

Relocation of flying units resulting in the closure of the airfield at RAF Wyton

Due to the significant running costs associated with maintenance of an operational airfield at RAF Wyton, it has been decided to relocate the flying units based there. No. 57(R) Squadron, who undertake Elementary Flying Training (EFT), will relocate from RAF Wyton to RAF Cranwell by the summer of 2013. The relocation of Cambridge and London University Air Squadrons (UAS) and No. 5 Air Experience Flight (AEF) to RAF Wittering is planned by mid 2014, once preparatory work has been completed. We are working closely with the Homes and Communities Agency on the possibility of them acquiring part of the Wyton airfield since it has potential for new housing growth as identified in Huntingdon District Council's emerging Local Plan.

The opportunity has been taken to rationalise other light aircraft flying tasks in the region to achieve greater coherency and more efficient use of manpower and assets, delivering better value for money for the taxpayer. This will result in East Midlands Universities Air Squadron and No. 115(R) Squadron relocating from RAF Cranwell to RAF Wittering.

There are 18 Service personnel who will be redeployed as a result of this change and two MOD civilians will be affected.

The closure of RAF Church Fenton

Reductions in the flying training pipeline, directed by the SDSR, mean that RAF Church Fenton is no longer required to host training operations and will close by the end of 2013. The units based at Church Fenton, including the Yorkshire University Air Squadron (incorporating No. 9 Air Experience Flight), will relocate; work is ongoing to determine the optimum location for the University Air Squadron.

There are five Service personnel who will be redeployed as a result of this change and three MOD civilians will be affected.

Relocation of Military Scottish Air Traffic Control from Prestwick

The Military Scottish Air Traffic Control Centre (ScATCC(Mil)) currently operates from the NATS Air Traffic Control Centre at Prestwick in Ayrshire. ScATCC(Mil) controls military and some civilian air traffic within its Area of Responsibility, which roughly extends north from Newcastle. Technological advances mean that the system can be rationalised and it will be possible to cover the Military control task for the entire country from the London Air Traffic Control Centre (LATCC(Mil)) at Swanwick. There will be no detrimental impact on air traffic control.

The phased relocation of the RAF presence from Prestwick will be completed by the end of 2013, and will be managed in consultation with NATS En-route Ltd, who will provide the necessary technical and equipment changes under the Future Military Area Radar Services contract. Around 30 Service personnel will be redeployed as a result of this change, which will also impact up to six civilian personnel.

Disposal of the former airfield and technical site at Kirton in Lindsey

Following the vacation of RAF Kirton in Lindsey by No. 1 Air Control Centre (1ACC), the site has been used to house personnel employed at RAF Scampton. While this use will continue, alternative Defence uses have not been identified for the former airfield and technical facilities, so a decision has now been taken to dispose of these parts of the site.

Rationalisation of Shorncliffe Garrison

There is an enduring requirement for facilities at Shorncliffe Garrison. However much of the infrastructure is old, in poor condition and expensive to heat, light and maintain. MOD is therefore commencing redevelopment and rationalisation of the garrison to deliver a long-term, sustainable estate.

Shepway District Council's Local Development Framework Core Strategy has identified Shorncliffe Garrison for a development of up to 1,200 homes to help regenerate the western end of Folkestone; the site will also contribute to the Government's Plan for Growth housing strategy. Surplus land will be released in phases over the next decade.

Rationalisation of the Defence presence at MOD St Athan

In announcing the outcome of the Army Basing Review on 5 March 2013, the Secretary of State confirmed that 14 Signal Regiment would relocate to St Athan. This is likely to result in consolidation of the Defence presence on the site into a military enclave centred on Churchill Lines (St Athan West Camp).

Discussions have been ongoing with the Welsh Government, which leases large areas of the St Athan site, to establish how Defence plans can also complement economic development by enabling its aim to develop an aerospace business park within the St Athan Enterprise Zone. MOD has no current requirement beyond 2017 for the St Athan 'Superhangar', which will progressively be made available for commercial occupation. The intent remains to relocate No. 4 School of Technical Training from East Camp at St. Athan to Lyneham, Wiltshire in the medium term as part of the Defence Technical Training Change Programme.

We also intend to move personnel of the RAF's No. 71 Investigation and Repair Squadron from St Athan to collocate with other components of No. 42 (Expeditionary Support) Wing at RAF

Wittering. The relocation of the Squadron will affect 47 Service personnel who will transfer to RAF Wittering. It will also affect 27 civilian staff.

The Future of MOD Ashchurch

The MOD Ashchurch site is currently the central MOD hub for vehicle operations. However, the Ashchurch Depot facilities are coming to the end of their lifespan and parts of the site are no longer used. The facilities would need extensive renewal to continue effective operation, while the vehicle numbers that the site supports are reducing as a result of the SDSR. The MOD is reviewing a number of vehicle basing options and has identified opportunities for greater efficiency from relocating facilities, rather than investing in the infrastructure at the site. Consequently, MOD will be withdrawing from the site entirely unless retention of a small number of specific buildings proves better value for money.

This site has the potential capacity for up to 2,100 new homes. A public consultation has been conducted so that wider views and opinions can be taken into account in any future development.

Rationalisation of the MOD Bicester site

On 3 October 2011, the MOD made an application to Cherwell District Council for outline planning permission to allow the release of the Graven Hill site at Bicester to accommodate a mixed use development, including 1,900 dwellings, and with the potential to deliver over 2,000 jobs and a new MOD logistics facility on part of the site.

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