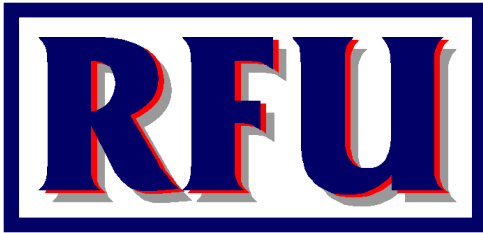


SERVING FIREFIGHTERS



SERVING THE COMMUNITY

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Monday, 28 May 2007

Dear Shaun

**Ref: Feedback on RDS Projects 12 & 3**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our response to the documentation on the three workgroups documentation recently received.

Firstly may I state that it is great that HFRS have commissioned resources to look into the issues affecting the RDS component of the service. From the Governments original document "The Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System" published in February 2005 it has been a long and sometimes arduous journey. Your efforts and guidance in presenting these results are really appreciated.

**Overview of all Projects**

Firstly, whilst considering all three projects we have two issues which we would like to bring to your attention. When the project documentation for the three projects was delivered to us (on the 16<sup>th</sup> May 2007) you advised that an 'over arching' document composed by yourself would be forwarded within a few days. To date this document has not been received. I do not feel that formal consultation can occur until we have received all documentation. Obviously it puts us at a disadvantage of making comments without viewing your final comments and conclusions.

Secondly, we do not feel that your comments "*the RB's were part of the development process*" is an accurate representation. Much of this was hampered by our involvement with the Hay Job Evaluation which allowed us practically no spare time to attend many of the meetings and so provide comprehensive input.

In addition, despite requesting such for meetings we could not attend, I received no interim documentation of the projects development.

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## Work Group One

The opportunity of offering a more flexible working environment for individuals and enabling HFRS to fit more comfortably into RDS employee's lives is applauded. However this project does not read easily and I do not feel sits comfortably as a professional record of investigation and conclusions. Some presumptions are made based on hearsay and do not offer adequate data to support the conclusions made.

It is the RFU's opinion that a front loaded salary scheme could easily become a demotivator, in addition the observation that individuals from different stations may effectively be working side by side and re numerated at different hourly rates is neither just nor fair.

### **Introduction**

#### Observation 1

Your statement "...*that provide opportunity for their engagement in a wider range of duties.*..." is not backed up with substantial evidence of what these duties could be. Your example of the RDS Awareness Team comprises only a few members and is not really an opportunity for RDS Personnel County-wide. Co-responders are also a service offered by only a few RDS stations with definitely no clear strategy for this to be rolled out across Hampshire. Even CFS activities (after two years of it being a core component for WDS stations) have not yet been rolled out to all RDS stations and there is no clear strategy to do so. I request to see much better evidence of what future roles would be made available to RDS stations County wide.

#### Observation 2

"*Fair, consistent and equitable*" should not be part of this project but rather a core function within every service project and HR contract. It should not be promoted as a separate scoped point within this project.

#### Observation 3

Although you mention the benefits of this project, the document describes itself as a Report not an advertising brochure. To ensure that the project has been properly investigated I would like the possible pitfalls and disadvantages to have been identified and recorded.

#### Observation 4

Why are the conclusions included in the introduction? Surely the introduction would identify why the project was initiated, the drivers and current situation.

#### Observation 5

No mention or acknowledgement is made of commitment but rather the emphasis is made on incident attendance. One of the RFU's core arguments is that; considering two individuals one at a busy station and one at a quiet station over a specific weekend, they both offer the same level of 'commitment' to the service being available when required. There is no recognition or even mention of commitment within this report. I feel this is a fundamental flaw.

## Outline Deliverables

We recognise and welcome the inclusion within this project of enabling RDS employees to "*achieve their full potential for personal development within IPDS*" in addition we recognise the efforts to consider the WTD within this scope.

## Background

An assumption is made about declining responses "*in response to community safety initiatives and HFRS schools education policies*". We have yet to see any clear statistical evidence to back this up and the claim that this solely due to HFRS efforts is purely supposition. Current IRMP documents show no sure sign of declining incidents in fact some total incidents have increased. In addition an increasing population and increasing reliance on vehicles is not considered. We obviously support any efforts made by HFRS to reduce risk throughout Hampshire and fully support the tenets of the IRMP, however we have not seen any data analysis to support a major decision based on declining incidents. Consequently, we feel that such a claim is currently no less than propaganda.

However, if the service feels that this is a definite trend of declining incidents, then there will be less demand for the HFRS service especially RDS whose activity is incident related. Conclusively RDS wages must also be falling in reflection of this. Consequently the drivers for initiating this project become less clear.

HRFU have mentioned time and time again that the terminology "*perverse incentive*" is inaccurate and totally unfair. It is not indicative, reflective or a fair way to describe the motives of RDS fire fighters. There is no evidence to suggest this. This comment was also brought to your attention prior to the document being published and you advised it would be removed.

We find it very hard to believe that a public body which is accountable to the tax payers does not have the resources or ability to accurately come up with figures for RDS employment over a greater period of time than 3 years thus be able to provide a much more insightful and accurate picture of RDS budgetary demands.

We were rather surprised to identify that no 'Blue Sky Thinking' was reported at the project inception. It is common project practise to remove all technological and budgetary limitations to enable a group to identify what a 'perfect solution; would be. In addition it is recorded that enquiries were made throughout Fire Services within the UK, again I was surprised that no enquiries were made outside of an organisation group which has already been noted by the Government as being poorly resourced to look after RDS employees.

## Research

May we have the data to prove that there is "*a perceived lack of fairness between the wide cover of availability provisions in hours that attracts the same 75% part cover*". A statement like this can drive the development and direction of this project and needs to be substantiated to ensure an accurate representation of requirements.

## Existing Data

We question the accuracy of the RMS system which has been used as data collection tool and feel that additional management data repositories should be harvested to back up policy formulation.

## Annualised Salary Scheme

We recognise the corporate benefits of a cost neutral system, however from the RFU perspective the system should not allow any reduction in pay however constructed. Under the national agreement there are only two payment rates 75% and 100%. Consequently the lowest payment that HFRS can pay individuals is 75%. This will be our starting point for any further negotiation.

## Table

This table contradicts the statement that "*rates of payment remain those nationally agreed*" There is no national agreement for 80%, 60% or 40%.

- The 40% value should therefore equate to current 75% payment
- The 60% value should therefore equate to current 100% payment
- The 80% value should therefore equate to current 125% payment
- The 100% value should therefore equate to current 150% payment

In addition this tables column "*Pay at hours*" should reflect the maximum amount of hours contracted. HFRS should not pay an individual 131 hours when they are contracted to work 144 hours!

The '*Menu of suite of task*' evaluated should be suffixed with '*nationally agreed rates*' after every example we would not welcome or negotiate HFRS RDS employees being paid anything less than their agreed contractual payment.

No explanation is made as to why the aim of the model was to be "*cost neutral*". The document reports that incidents will be falling due to HFRS CFS initiatives, so the budgetary cost for RDS should also fall no acknowledgement is made of this. The cost-neutral system although beneficial on paper to an organisation is idealistic and too restrictive in offering a contractually agreeable system. Considering the commitment being offered and the observation that RDS firefighters are already a poorly kept Fire Service resource, no sound argument is made as to why any RDS firefighter should expect less than they are currently receiving.

#### Point 6

Web – based should be removed I do not see why this is a pre-requisite, especially as no research has been undertaken as to if this would be beneficial or useful for RDS firefighters. It must neither be presumed that every RDS firefighter has clear access and the skills to use a PC nor must there be any 'expectations' that RDS firefighters should attend the station more than once a week to update their availability as there is no contractual obligation to do so.

#### Point 7

The statement "*The logical solution to this problem would be to classify stations as busy, average or quiet*" is not accurate. Why is this a "*logical solution*"? Who decides the three steps and what happens to those just short of a step. It could as easily be argued that the logical solution is to pay RDS firefighters a monthly retainer and pay them an additional amount for when they are required. This escapes 'stepped payments', league tables and definitions of 'busy', 'average' or 'quiet' and spate conditions

#### Point 8

"*Feedback confirmed the perceived lack of fairness between the wide cover availability provisions in hours*" who has decided this – there must be data to support such a strong accusation as such a comment could have strong drivers to force through any recommendations.

#### Point 9

We welcome the introduction of rider rota boards throughout the service.

It has been reported to me that an annual salary is better for the corporation to control and budget for costs. The fact that stand-by's and additional hours will be paid on top of the annual salary removes the advantages for an annualised salary, in addition the service advises it thinks call-outs will fall. We therefore would be interested in the drivers for investigating the annualised salary scheme.

### **Strategic Project Considerations**

I am unsure as to what this section is discussing; it seems to go off on a tangent and is unrelated to the main project explanation. It discusses a second phase which is un-researched and unrelated to this as yet, unapproved project.

### **Conclusion**

We recognise and applaud the service spending time and resources on investigating different payment types for RDS employees. However we feel that this project fails in a number of significant ways:

1. No argument, investigation, research or resources are spent on looking at the current system and seeing if it fails and if it concludes it does, investigation undertaken to establish if it could not be adapted rather than thrown out with the bathwater.
2. No identification is made as to what the service is ideally looking for and the drivers for this.
3. Apart from an unsubstantiated "perceived lack of fairness" very little is said about what the individual would like from the fire service.
4. The project is littered with unsupported assumptions and observations which hold no evidence that they have been properly researched.



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## Work Group Two

Generally we support any resources provided by HFRS to encourage and support new entrants and welcome their efforts in this direction. Although we appreciate it is not a factor which HFRS can affect, we feel that recruitment should be more nationally driven.

We welcome the introduction of mentoring and the monitoring database which we feel recognises the requirements of individuals during the application process. In addition we agree that the Retained Duty System Awareness Team are not the ones to mentor and a dedicated team should be developed.

### **Retained Management System**

As unions we welcome a new and improved RMS and support HFRS in developing the system. However we are concerned with the current choices and do not feel that all options have been fully investigated or the project properly scoped. In addition we do not feel that the drivers for this system are recorded and would like this point illustrated more.

#### Point 1

There must be a built-in flexibility to the system to acknowledge the human element of living with a pager. We would like this recognised in any further documentation. Whereas WTD employees can dedicate their working time to HFRS it should be recognised that RDS co-habit their on-duty time with their family and work lives.

#### Point 2

Again it is not mentioned how this project was scoped, was any work undertaken to identify what exactly was required which would work for both the service and the employee taking away technological and financial restraints also were possible systems looked at outside of the fire service?

#### Point 3

Our observation of the Sophtlogic system is that too many items are 'being developed'. It is our experience that these teasers are merely introduced to get a sale and that those components under development are often never seen as such. If this option were chosen we would expect to see a more formal declaration by the company as to the window of development for those components not yet integrated.

#### Point 4

Whilst we appreciate that it is some time off it does not seem that any acknowledgement made of regional control and systems compatibility especially before major expenditure is made?

#### Point 5

Again HRFU would like it recognised that there is no contractual obligation for RDS employees to attend the station to update RMS except on drill nights. It is accepted that RDS employees deliver over this requirement however it is not a contractual requirement and therefore should be recognised and not factored in.

#### Point 6

Your paragraph "*An assumption has been made that all RDS employees have a mobile phone...*" is wildly speculative and not sympathetic with the description of this document as a final report. It is not a contractual obligation and this point should be recognised.

**Conclusion**

We welcome investigating improving the current system of managing RDS crews and the resources that HFRS have put into this. In addition we accept that there is a need to better manage the resources available to control. However, I would like to see a lot more of this project considering the individual and what would benefit them, what would be convenient and improve their interaction with HFRS. If you try to roll out a system which is too sited in its corporate advantages and has only slight individual benefits it will not be properly adopted and could even fail.

## Work Group Three

### Overview

It is our belief that the assumption that RDS operate below the base line of knowledge required by HFRS is fundamentally flawed. There is certainly no evidence to support this, no extra incidents or reportable accidents where RDS employees feature more highly than their WDS colleagues. We believe that the metrics of measuring skills and training required are flawed and not realistic in the real world. It seems that the corporate body has a low opinion of the abilities of its individuals. Much is made of a project undertaken a few years back which identified the amount of training required per item of kit and whereas this particular project was factually correct it took no account of individuals ability to learn and remember.

In addition no allowance is made for outside skills and prior learning.

### Recommendation One

We broadly support this recommendation however the opportunity to standard test must be made to home station based individuals. However it should also be recognised that standard tests are an important training and competency opportunity.

We also feel that the service as a whole needs to review its standard test procedure - is there any benefit to starting and using equipment to 'standard test' it when this action is probably causing more harm and has no benefits. Consequently time could be saved by modernising the standard test procedure.

### Recommendation Two

We support this recommendation

### Recommendation Three

We oppose the tenets of this recommendation and are deeply concerned by the diagram which clearly defines a two level fire service. It has been widely stated by SMT that a fire fighter is a firefighter is a firefighter and that the playing field should be level, but within this diagram there is a clear demarcation between WDS and RDS.

However the recommendation that drill nights could be split is a supported motion. We would like to be sure that crews are not constantly split but there is a more dynamic flow. We would also like it to be recognised that the opportunity for shift workers to have flexibility in attending more drill nights be recorded i.e. that the individuals drill night may not be set in stone.

We would also like the opportunity for individuals to not be limited to the one drill night but could attend two nights to increase competency and skills for specialist roles/vehicles or to fast track their competences.

On RDS/WDS stations the opportunity for RDS to train with their WDS colleagues should be made available.

### Recommendation Four

We are not in agreement with this recommendation for a number of reasons:

It seems unfair but more importantly no data supports the argument to reduce the skills of RDS employees at multi vehicle stations when they have been providing such a service with no specific incidents based on their shift system in the last twenty years, in fact it should be recognised that other services in the Country have identified the cost benefits and actually offer specialist vehicle support to RDS employees only.

If it purely based off training requirements then additional training should be first offered to the individuals who are currently competent and new opportunities to all crew at the local station.

Finally local skills are not being recognised.

### Recommendation Five

Again there seems to be no data to support the matching of equipment. It first must be identified that any pump may be asked to attend any incident anywhere in Hampshire and competencies currently reflect this. The scenario

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where an RDS pump at stand by in a city cannot undertake any life saving roles at, for example a high rise incident, is untenable.

In addition the increased knowledge requirement for control with regards to what specific equipment and crews are capable of would create an unworkable countywide issue.

This would also seriously reduce the resilience of the service offering the IRMP.

Finally the services offering of skills and resources should be the same for every tax payer in the county not dictated by shift type or geographic location.

#### Recommendation Six

Again Is there data to support that deficiencies are evident- the time saved by not undertaking specific training tasks is only about 8 minutes a training night so savings are minimal.

Any fire fighter in Hampshire can be called at any time to attend any incident anywhere in the county in addition HFRS have a health and safety obligation to ensure all of their staff is sufficiently trained for all incidents.

John Bonney states that a "a firefighter is a firefighter is a firefighter", we think that this seriously undermines the efficiency of the service giving control a hideous task of trying to match resources against requirements.

Once again this contradicts the statement by SMT of level playing fields and all firefighters being the same just working under different contracts.

#### Recommendation Seven

We fully support this recommendation and would welcome the introduction of more advanced online training aids.

#### Recommendation Eight

In support of this recommendation but we still feel that local skills should be recognised in addition there is an inbuilt assumption in the fire service that anything learnt is forgotten over a two year cycle. We would feel that training should be more accurately matched to the individual recognising individual training needs rather than the re-circulating of a two year training cycle.

#### Recommendation Nine

In support of this recommendation

#### Recommendation Ten

In support of this recommendation

#### Recommendation Eleven

In support of this recommendation so long as resources are made available to ensure that the service can be properly delivered without overloading individuals.

#### **Conclusion**

In essence we support the direction this report feels training should go, however we would welcome more individual flexibility, the acceptance that RDS can offer cost effective, efficient and safe specialist roles within the service and that opportunities and more recognition of both outside and HFRS learnt skills.

## **Finally**

May I thank you for the opportunity to provide this feedback. Obviously if you want to discuss any of this in more detail, do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,

Rikki Noble  
HRFU Chairman

