



**In his own words "your publication is seen as informative and thought provoking and importantly fair in the issues that it covers so I am happy to be associated with it and to offer myself for this interview"**

### 1) Favourite Band? Food? Holiday Destination

Pasta and Italian Food, Van Morrison & Texas, Nepal and Cornwall

### 2) What made you want to join the Fire Service and when you joined did you plan to be a chief?

As a 21-year-old graduate, I was looking for some excitement and something **that had a practical effect**. Being from a working class background, **my family expected me after university**, to be something like a lawyer so was surprised by my choice. However **rather** than ambitious I am more someone who gets bored easily and wanted a real challenge so the Fire Service fitted me well.

I never had dreams of becoming a Chief until I left Gloucestershire as a dep for Hampshire, only then did I believe that it may be possible. To be fair, if I was more career orientated I could have become a Chief sooner but wanted to be with a Fire Service I respected.

### 3) What made you apply to be Chief at Hampshire Fire and Rescue?

Having seen a number of brigades I felt that Hampshire was a good fire service with a great potential. The potential to be a respected player in the national scene and an iconic fire service that other brigades will look to as an example.

### 4) Can you name for me two of your most important accomplishments as a senior manager in the Fire Service?

- 1) Setting up new style **officer development programme** in London
- 2) Dealing with the aftermath of a major chemical incident that flooder. It took two weeks and was truly hands on.

John felt that this showed two contrasting elements in the Fire Service as well, one as a manager of an organisation that required internal people skills and one as an operational fire fighter – getting dirty!

### 5) Currently the government is putting a tremendous amount of pressure on you to make multiple and sometimes major changes across Hampshire Fire and Rescue. Do you feel that each and every one of these changes is necessary and that the guiding forces (the Government Ministers) are dead right with their decisions?

No, not every change is beneficial. Although change is due I think that what is currently occurring is too much change in too many areas. Things are being missed and the opportunity to coordinate change is lost, sometimes you will experience two sets of changes that may appear to be odds with one another. There is therefore conflict and anxieties rise. Evidently the government have an agenda and they are pushing this through hoping to build up a momentum to enable more change. However, the Government do listen and I think that some of this change is being pulled back a bit now to enable the dust to settle. As identified there are many, many Government changes introduced almost daily and part of my job is to insulate the organisation from this change and percolate the right ones to the right areas of the service.



**6) What one major IRMP implementation do you feel has been most properly thought through and provides the most beneficial guide to HFRS?**

Genuinely trialling things such as the co-responder etc, trials do work although sometimes the outcomes are not quite as expected. For example, moving the pumps at Havant and Waterlooville has resulted in us thinking about **the shift patterns and how we use our resources to match the profile of risk**. Changes are not easy and we identify that we sometimes are not seen to discuss and communicate our intentions, We do recognise this and hope that by liaising more closely with those affected in future we may be seen to be better at managing trials.

**7) What one major IRMP implementation do you not feel has been properly researched by the government?**

Answered above

**8) Have you ever been or experienced life as a Retained Firefighter?**

On a number of incidents in Gloucestershire I had the opportunity of working with retained fire fighters. In Gloucestershire 50% of the service is retained so we obviously met up quite often. My view however is that sometimes too much distinction is made between Retained and Wholetime firefighters. As far as I am concerned these two are only methods of delivery of a service and in fact are part of the same service just from a different sources. **I recognise that the only people working the sorts of hours I put in as the Chief in the fire service are retained fire fighters because of their dual responsibilities.**

**9) As a senior manager in HFRS, how would you introduce a major change to your working teams role or work description?**

I would engage my people more and ensure that they are well informed and part of the change. Currently Hampshire Fire and Rescue have not engaged with their **staff or communicated nearly enough**. I recognise that to successfully develop we need to involve our staff more and talk with them. We are now extremely keen to implement better communication and the new Communications Department is proof of this.

Over the last few months we have become increasingly concerned about some of the recent changes pursued by management. We stress that we welcome development and modernisation and accept that not all change can be beneficial to RDS Firefighters in particular. However, many of the changes that are being effectively forced on us, seem to be ill thought through and designed more to be beneficial for internal data harvesting and monitoring rather than actively improving us as firefighters or the service we offer our communities. To highlight this three topics in particular we would like to dwell on:

**BA:** After a years trial, the new BA sets were first introduced with personal face masks, this was then reversed and masks per set were re-introduced.

How does a business the size of HFRS seem to be able to make such massive and expensive mistakes, time and time again especially as it seems that projects of this size have long lead times and are well resourced?

**RMS:** Poorly introduced and rushed through, we had officers presenting the new initiative to us admitting that service orders had not been written consequently they could not answer any questions and felt themselves that the system was not properly evaluated or thought through. To highlight;



- After a supposed one year of development, within two weeks of being launched fundamental changes were being made to the sheets design.
- The first draft of service orders offered to us were not only poorly written but in direct contravention to the grey book.
- Finally, after a month of being launched officers are now being asked to write 'dnr' comments on FF who don't turn out – consequently and considering the system was introduced to us as a great new way for everyone to quickly see who is available to ride, now the whole launch looks like it was a covert opportunity to introduce a spy. (Bear in mind also that most stations had developed their own system.

We wholly support a system where individual FF are properly audited but this system is poorly designed, ridiculously expensive and in its primary role fails within 12 hours of drill night every week.

### **10) Do you get advised of such systems or do you hear about them and can you comment on this?**

The example BA: We were advised by experts outside of HFRS that the interpretation of the law would mean that every firefighter would need their own issue face mask. Litigation is becoming more and more a consideration for us so we undertook this task. As it turns out the interpretation was incorrect and we actually see it as a strength that we identified this and reverted to the original system rather than continuing with the more complicated system.

Ultimately, we do not deliberately make mistakes and do not identify trials as a way of surreptitiously introducing news systems into working practise. We recognise that communication is not always as could as it should be with **trials and hope in future to discuss more. Hence one of the reasons we formerly recognised the RFU was to look to work with them in the future to improve the levels of communications and understand better the needs of retained firefighters.**

We also like to consider the whole aspect of change and do hear what is reported back. CFS for example; HFRS wanted to recompense the retained crews from Havant and Winchester for the disruption during the station movements so offered them this initiative rather than what many perceived as more obvious to use the wholetime resource.

**8/80:** When an alerter goes off, every RDS firefighter in the county attempts to get to the fire station and turn out as quickly and as safely as possible. On mounting the pump, the driver and crew then makes every effort to get to the scene of the emergency as quickly and as safely as possible taking into account what that actual emergency is.



**11) Whereas we accept that you have stressed that stations should not feel under any pressure, do you not agree that by the sheer nature of the statistic unreal pressures would be felt at stations?**

8/80 is a standard that we aspire to and that we can present to the public. The public have a right to know that when they call on our services, when they should be able to expect our arrival. The original 5,5 8 was not publicly friendly or easily communicated. If 8/80 is not met then it is not the retained's fault and I am not asking people to travel faster but to think differently. 8/80 is a organisation wide initiative and its success should be considered before the wheels turn on your appliance. From the moment of call, can we control activate the alerter system more efficiently (for example before capturing the full address details of the caller)? Will a rota system enable riders to mount the pump any quicker (with those not 'on' helping them)? However, no additional action can be taken after the wheels turn. 8/80 is an organisational initiative affecting control, vehicle procurement, incident type and local initiatives. It is an LPI (Local Performance Indicator) for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the Fire Service and is one who's affects filter through the whole service. However, the figure is used to show people how we are doing and to effectively promote the Fire Service externally and not used as a measurement internally.

Considering both of these examples, what concerns the HRFU is that HFRS are trying to force members of the RDS into black and white statistical tables. This is a possible solution for a company with full time staff, but by nature of what and how a retained fire station works the same metrics cannot be applied. Throughout the county its station officers effectively and professionally locally manage it, which is after all why you appoint and pay them.

**12) Is it not better to provide resources to individual stations that are having problems and not rock an already nervous boat that lies in the waters of uncertainty due the many changes underway at HFRS?**

It is a balance between the two. What drive's us towards uniformity is Health and Safety and the legal implications associated with it. For example we cannot change or affect the Working time Regulations. However, in other areas we are looking to encourage and foster more independence. I will be giving budgets to managers soon to help them run their own stations and try to provide more independence and discretion as to how monies are spent . I have to be careful though that autonomy does lead to more administration on stations, a balance has to be struck.

Often the comparison of private sector to public sector is used with HFRS, however it is dangerous to try comparing the two. We both work to a different set of ethics. Ours is a politically driven organisation with politicians as our masters. Politicians have different agendas to private managers.

Are we well run? We are certainly not bad, but we could do much better.

We are starting to hear with more and more frequency how HFRS are in this rank for this function (eg racial discrimination) or that position for another function (e.g. budget efficiency).

**13) Do you feel that (the governments) demands for statistics is actually detracting people from their core role and making you as CEO focus on achieving those targets rather than managing the unique business and achieving a global good rather than a ranking swerved one?**

From a public sector point of view we are presented with too many targets although Central Government does recognise this. Personally I focus on a few targets for example arson and fire deaths. If I can reduce these then I

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consider we are doing well. With regards to being ranked, it does not worry me I feel that if we are good then the targets should follow rather than us being target driven.

**14) Would you consider you have been a successful CFO if HFRS achieve the position it requires in every rank?**

I want us to be in the top 20% as it then reflects we are providing a very high quality service. I do not feel that I personally am target driven but rather I want to be doing a good job and proud to be doing it.



Administrative Duties have almost tripled in the last few years for any station officer and we are now seeing more administrative tasks passed on to the FF role. As we have such a short time each week to keep ourselves current with training, these tasks are eating into our drill nights.

**15) Is this recognised by you and what do you think HFRS can do to reduce the administrative burden on RDS personnel, not allowing just throwing additional man-hours and personnel at the problem?**

Yes, it is appreciated – the burden is coming from Health and Safety and target setting. Our aim to combat this is to do things smarter for example by improving the network, looking at what we require and identifying if we can get this from other places. (This years network budget is the greatest it has ever been to reflect this initiative). It is a concern and worry. **I do see we are reaching point where we will need to recognise the core operational work of a firefighter cannot simply go on being extended. We will need to make some clear choices about training a limited number of people separately to undertake specialist roles such as urban search and rescue, marine firefighting, How we attract people from across both WT and RDS will be very important both in terms of equity but also to make best use of our resources.**

It is apparent that middle management still have not grasped the realities of the RDS service, just looking at last weeks Routine Notices, two examples still prove this;

- Committing to equality in HFRS
  - "...is now available on our website at...."
- Communication, Communication, Communication (rather ironically from the Internal Communication dept)
  - "...an email has been sent ...." And last week
  - "...this report will be published on the HFRS Intranet..."

Do you think this is a fair statement and if so what do you think can be done to resolve this?

I am proud of the website however anything that makes people feel separate is a worry. There is therefore an issue to ensure that we give a clearer message. The Corporate Communication Strategy will start to be implemented in June and rolled out over the next year and I hope this will reverse these feelings.

Communication is not something HFRS is necessarily good at but the new Communications Department I hope will **help us** correct this.

The ODPM document which reviews recruitment and retention challenges for RDS firefighters, details 51 recommendations for fire services to review. Certainly it does not take much reading to see that the government want RDS firefighters role to be highlighted, improved and for individual fire services to make better use of them.

**16) What are your views on this document?**

I have read the document and I think that this document is actually becoming quite dated. The document discussed retained firefighters but I think the difference between retained and wholetime are becoming blurred. The documents recommendations are unrealistic in that some of its recommendations would take years to achieve. Is there such a thing as retained? Instead we will have teams of specialists activities with one role but different contracts of employment. Things will not be quite so clear cut as they may be now for example: If workshops moved to Service Headquarters during the daytime we would have enough staff to **crew** a pump so may not require a dedicated wholetime contingent. But then, would these staff be wholetime? They would be employed by HFRS as workshop employees and retained firefighters. The definitions would be blurred.

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**18) How much of your work every month do you think is involved with purely RDS operations and did you imagine that your role as Chief would involve such a commitment?**

(can we sit down at a later date and go through these with senior management?).

40% of time allocated to 'response' goes towards RDS duties. And yes as retained cover 80% of the county I do not underestimate this time.

**19) If you could design from the ground up the perfect Fire Service what would it be like?**

One that treats everybody as adults and people don't say  
"them and us", just "us."

**20) We have great readership throughout the RDS FF in Hampshire. What message would you like to send out to the rank and file who are feeling disenfranchised by new systems, management targets and just want to serve their community well? Will it get better or worse?**

Thankyou! I recognise how much commitment the retained service supply and how the changes can hurt. However, change on this scale is never well ordered and can be inconsistent and fairly "agricultural" but there is a common good and it will get better with the RDS as an intrinsic part of HFRS.

We would like to thank John Bonney for his time.