

SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Tuesday, 16 August 2005

HRFU
Serving the local community

The View From Here

Today I went for a 15 kilometre run, it was a glorious day and the jog through the French countryside was spectacular. I am currently on holiday so I have some time to engage in leisure pursuits. I am not a fast runner so taking into account a proper warm up, cool down and shower; this session took a good 90 minutes of my day. Holidays - great for leisure activities, but what happens when I get home? HFRS expect me to maintain an above average level of fitness - something I agreed to when I signed my contract but the realism of finding this 90 minutes can become harder and harder to find with family, work commitments and retained duties.

I acknowledge that HFRS do supply RDS stations with fitness equipment for personnel to make use of, but the use of this equipment has to be in our own time. Consider how you would manage the access for 15 plus firefighters to this equipment during the week especially as this would certainly be during evenings and weekends.

Fitness expectations are covered in Service Orders. HFRS comply with the structure of the order. They do supply facilities and the Occupational Health department provide support but to what level? In addition they both discuss 'fitness' but neither define what fitness is. This issue is based around SO 8/7/1 and TAPs which OCH feels are not always treated seriously enough.

HFRS offers us a 'free medical' to ensure that this "fitness" is maintained. It is this however that reveals the failings of the system when a firefighter is not deemed fit enough to ride.

Occupational Health feels that identifying a fire fighter not 'fit' has provided them with a very important and possibly life-saving service. Taking them off the run is just a legal requirement of this service.

A firefighter is an important commodity and possibly after many years of service one HFRS has invested most money in. To take a firefighter off the run is a serious action, traumatic to the individual and sometimes crippling to a station. Currently the action undertaken by HFRS is seen as casting the fire fighter out and advising them to return only when they are improved. I feel the current process used falls far short of what a good employer should offer.

The Fitness Assessment is a test we must undergo every year. With little if any warning, a fitness assessor turns up at the station often poorly presented and feeds station personnel through a series of fitness tests. Those who fail are summarily taken off the run with little if any real counselling or on occasions it seem adherence to protocol.

We deserve a lot better from our employers and expect that should a firefighter be taken off the run due to medical reasons HFRS expend a great deal of resources into getting them back on the run through a structured and informed process.



In Next Months Issue

In next months issue we investigate how the fire service may look in a few years, every house to have a smoke alarm by 2010—we look at the maths of this challenge and we try to predict the changes that RDS firefighters may experience in the modernisation of the fire service.

The RFU newsletter—designed to educate, inform and entertain.

RFU *part of the solution not the problem*



RESPONSE TIMES (1)

Modernisation of the UK Fire and Rescue Service brought in many changes, one of these saw the end of the old Standards of Fire Cover. These standards, first developed in the 30s, were designed around the factors of building construction, density and occupancy. They introduced targets for attendance times based on the degree of risk. As our cities and towns were redeveloped (particularly after WWII) fire protection and prevention measures were introduced to the point that now areas originally deemed to be of high risk very rarely suffer fatalities in fires.

Targets are often given bad press, unjustifiably so in my book. As an emergency organisation we have to set targets against which we can assess our performance. Meeting the target suggests that our strategy and devoted resources are correct, failure to meet the target identifies a need to take action in order to bring the trend towards target back on line. Although it can seem like it, failure is not about blame, but rather, looking at how we can do better. After all, improvement is better for the public. We currently review performance on a quarterly basis, although shortly, we will reduce the review period to monthly.



The current Local Performance Indicator (LPI 20) measures the percentage of emergency incidents we attend within 8 minutes, our target is 80%. Sadly we are not meeting this target and hence the reasons we are piloting innovative crewing arrangements and pre-alerting, is to seek an improvement in our attendance times. A downside to this indicator is that unless an appliance attends within 8 minutes it doesn't feature in the result.

Recognising this and other concerns registered by many people and the fact that this can be very de-motivating if the chance of always reaching the 8 mins target is very slight, the Service Management Team have developed an additional new, more inclusive indicator to supplement the information in LPI 20. The new LPI measures the average attendance time to emergency incidents.

Currently this is running at 6 minutes 40 seconds. That's the average time it takes us to get an appliance to an emergency incident in Hampshire.

Any reduction in attendance times, even if it would normally take 20 minutes to attend will have a beneficial effect on the average time. So improved topography, quicker turnouts, safer and improved driving skills etc mean that all can help improve our performance.

Sadly the trend for the last three years shows a very slight increase and again we need to look at how we can reduce attendance times, amongst the initiatives being piloted is that of pre-alerting, a system whereby stations are placed on standby as soon as an identifiable address is known.

Any other ideas for reducing our attendance times will be most welcome..... You make the attendance so you are well placed to suggest improvements. Please send your ideas to phil.webb@hantsfire.gov.uk.

Phil Webb Performance Review Manager

WHATS SO GOOD ABOUT "GOOD"

Today (Thursday 28 July) the Audit Commission announced a 'good' result for the Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority following its Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) earlier this year. The CPA took place early in 2005 when assessors from the Audit Commission visited Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority to assess how the organisation is being managed.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority is one of 47 fire authorities in England scored on how well they are run. Each is rated either 'excellent', 'good', 'fair', 'weak' or 'poor'.

Fire CPA is an assessment of how well an authority is being run at the corporate level. It does not judge how well the fire authority responds to emergencies or other incidents.

The assessment of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority found that the Fire Authority is performing well in the following areas:

- it has clear and coherent leadership from both senior officers and Fire Authority members;
- there is a clear long-standing commitment to preventing emergencies;

- it is good at managing people;
- it has robust future plans to continue to improve services for local communities.

The assessment raised the following areas in which the HFRS should improve its performance:

- continue working to improve internal communications and the engagement of staff; and
- continue working to develop a culture of performance management and improvement – as opposed to performance monitoring.

HRFU congratulates all of our members for being part of this recognition and we look forward to working with HFRS in achieving an even higher score next year!





TURNOUTS DURING DRILL PERIODS

The subject of being paid disturbance allowance when being called out on a drill night has been one that we have spent some time on over a substantial period of time. Following an analysis of the interim pay arrangements by the Hampshire RFU we discovered that HFRS had had some difficulty in interpreting the guidance issued by the Local Government Employers Organisation regarding payments for turnouts whilst on duty/drill. We sought clarification to ensure that the payments being made were in line with our interpretation of the guidance issued. HFRS Peter Walsh replied promptly to our enquiries and we are happy to report that the situation was efficiently resolved as follows

Clarification of the guidance from HFRS indicates the following:

The original intention (from 30th June 2004) was to pay drill night/on-duty turnout claims at only the relevant hourly rates (i.e. no disturbance allowance).

The monitoring process designed to ensure the full 13.74% pay rise is not compromised by this change has not yet been completed. As this has not yet been completed, the interim arrangements mentioned in NJC circular EMP/22/04 Appendix A (clarification notes - allowing the continuation of disturbance allowance payments) have been extended until further notice -notification will be via NJC circular.

This means we have been paying staff in line with the new rules before we should have done, thus underpaying each claim arising on duty or drill night by the £3.28 disturbance allowance. Total underpayments to individuals range from £3.28 to a maximum of £26.24 and only affect claims from April 05 pay onward. This is not a problem with the new RFI payroll system.

In light of our recent discussions with Hampshire RFU and given our close proximity to payroll running we shall check our figures carefully once payroll has run and notify staff of the problem. Corrections will be paid to those staff affected in September 2005 pay.

Staff completing FM1/2/2/1 (old FGA1) claim forms on station should therefore refrain from using the following four claim codes until further notice:

'TD' Turnout on Duty/Drill - (use 'T' until further notice)

'BD' Bank Holiday Turnout on Duty - (use 'B' until further notice)

'CC' Co-responder Bank Holiday Turnout whilst on duty - (use 'CB' until further notice)

'CD' Co-responder Turnout whilst on duty - (use 'CT' until further notice)



REDUCED CREWING

The local newspaper for the Portsmouth, Havant and Waterlooville area, "The News", has recently been very active in reporting HFRS proposals and new initiatives. On Friday 15 July it carried an article concerning the initiatives to enable reduced complement crews to respond to incidents. In the space of one article it is very difficult if not impossible to tell the full story.

The article was generally factually correct; however, where opinion was expressed the article obviously did not have the space to reveal the full philosophies of HFRS or the FBU.

Nationally the RFU and locally Hampshire RFU support the moves by HFRS to improve the service we provide to the communities of Hampshire. The Service senior management team now have the opportunity to modernise and respond to the safety requirements of our communities in ways not dreamt of only a few years ago. The RFU has been pressing for many years for Fire Services to think laterally and not be hidebound by an institutional system of insular belief. Those of us who work the RDS, generally, have seen our outside work environments change and respond to the needs of

customer's, employers, legislation, training, opportunity and not least increased mobility.

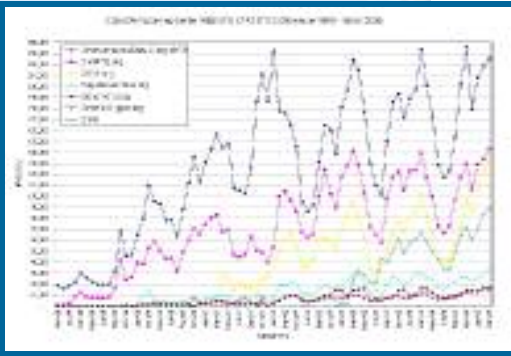
The Service had been to a large extent insulated from change and become a place to hide from the realities of life. This is borne out by the numerous reports that have been published over the last twenty years that have been ignored by Fire Authorities and Chief Fire officers. It's time for all stakeholders to engage together at Service meetings to ensure that change is beneficial to our communities and employees.

In general, HRFU accept the need in certain strategic areas for reduced crew level pumps as this can only help in improving the safety for the local area. So long as proper training has been undertaken as to the expectations of these reduced crews and make up crews are immediately dispatched it is a win win situation and we recognise the initiative.



WATCH YOUR COVER—70, 75 OR EVEN 80%

The RMS has completed the first quarter. So our link officers and group managers will be hot foot to stations armed with heaps of statistics. These will be the same stats that we all have access too on a read only basis so there will be no surprises. On second thoughts there will be surprises because not many of you can access the station computer and of those that can, they will be giving up before a result as the computer is so slow, recalcitrant or inoperative.



The interesting thing is how are the nine group managers and the multitude of link officers going to interpret the information? Lets leave aside the accuracy of the stats because that is another very interesting topic altogether.....

Those of us who have been in the Service some time were required to respond for a minimum of 70% of calls. Those that have joined in the last few years were required to respond to a minimum of 75% of calls. It has even been rumoured that one group has been singled out for special treatment, and they are required to respond to 80% of calls. We are currently waiting for this Group Manager to declare a state of unilateral independence. (Bear in mind that none of these figures have been negotiated or consulted on. This is currently being dealt with through the Joint Trade Union meetings).

Chief fire officer pension scheme collapse



Rumours of the Chief Fire Officers pension collapse have still not been substantiated, however this photo, taken a few weeks back makes it seem more likely. Perhaps we can set up a fund to support past Chiefs and ensure they have a comfortable retirement and not have to look for alternative employment?

(Seriously it was great to see Mr Eastwood supporting the Beaulieu Raft Race and providing such great fayre. Ronald McDonald should look out!)

HRFU Request

Do give us your feedback (praises and concerns) of the way this new swathe of statistics will be used at your station.....

The RMS service order does not make clear how the level of commitment will be measured or in fact what that level is. We conjecture that it will be tied in to the contractual hours agreed between the employer and employee. From the statistics it can be seen that several interpretations could surface. In fact it is going to be nine interpretations, one for each Group Manager.

It is important that the County Committee is kept informed at the earliest opportunity about what is

happening at station level. Then we can do something to resolve the issues.

RDS TO WDS

In Mays Newsletter we revealed that HFRS had introduced a new policy to accept applicants for local authority firefighter vacancies who were in associated fire fighting roles, for example MOD or airport fire staff. We recognised the progress that this represented but that it still left RDS firefighters wondering when they could apply for transfer to wholetime posts.

Well it seems that the answer was actually staring us in the face....

Currently, if you are not a local authority firefighter but are employed as a firefighter in your primary employment you will have, or be working towards, a BTEC qualification. It is this crucial qualification that allows this group of firefighters to be considered. With this qualification they can then be given the usual medical and assessment as to further training requirements to become a local authority firefighter.

RDS firefighters employed this year are being trained within the BTEC parameters and so undertaking the course will not be a problem. However, the question we have been asking is how can existing RDS

firefighters qualify.

It was identified at a recent meeting that if you have been a firefighter for 5 years and have undertaken the BTEC qualification you can be considered for a full time role. Currently HFRS are looking at making this course available to RDS firefighters through distance learning. It is a sizeable undertaking and will take some time – but it is on its way!



And it seems that things are developing on another front too with RDS firefighters being used to top up crewing levels at critically low stations. We welcome this utilisation and recognition of the equality in training and experience between both professionals.



If John Lennon were a firefighter...

.... "WHEN I'M 55"

The option of extending service beyond 55 years of age is, as you all know a possibility for all RDS employees—it is not an automatic right. However, the procedure for applying for an extension is generally not well known. We hope the following information will help clarify the situation, in particular please note the timelines:

- Individual expresses an interest in extending service beyond 55 in writing to Station Manager/Link Officer. This should be done at least **two months** prior to the retirement date.
- The Station Manager/Link Officer should endorse the application with a business case for the application to be approved.
- Group Manager endorses or denies the request and passes it on to DO (HR) for final decision.
- DO (HR) makes decision and informs the Group Manager by email followed by a letter.
- DO (HR) arranges a medical with Occupational Health.



- Occupational Health carries out medical and informs DO (HR) and the Group Manager of the results by letter.
 - Following a satisfactory medical DO (HR) writes to the individual confirming the extension of service.
- In the event of an individual wishing to appeal against the decision of the DO (HR) they should enter their appeal in writing stating the grounds for the appeal. This must be done within **two weeks** of receiving the decision and **must** be before the normal retirement date. Head of HR will give a decision in writing within two weeks.

If you have any enquiries with regards to this, do not hesitate to contact HRFU. It is particularly important that both you and HFRS observe the timelines described herein.

IMPROVING RESPONSE TIMES (2)

Following the meeting back in May between senior Management and RDS OIC's, SDO Butcher gave us this following update.

RDS Rota System.

The RDS Rota system is now being progressed to the trial stages. The rota boards have been ordered and the timers and lights are being produced internally. Subject to the findings of the trial we will roll out a finalised version asap. If the lights and timers are a success then we will fit these to all stations regardless of the rota system issues.

Provision of Blue Lights for responding personnel.

It is my intention to instruct a joint risk assessment of this with our internal driver training providers and the Police. I will inform you of progress at a later date.

Operate for stations when they are shown Off the run.

Currently when a station is off the run for less than 3 riders or no driver the Command and Control system does not propose that station when an incident is generated. This can be overcome by manually putting the station back on the run. I will progress this in conjunction with the next item. This will then have the advantage of not demotivating the 1 or 2 personnel that may turn in but that currently can not respond.

Less than 3 rider response

Risk assessments are currently being prepared for a response with less than 3 riders. This will include the use of a special vehicle as well as using a conventional pump. I will keep you updated with the progress.

Land Rover Response

Once again this is included in the less than 3 riders risk assessment. I will keep you informed.

Use of Message Pagers.

I have not initiated any work on this as yet. I will keep you informed of any ideas or developments.

Self Closing Appliance Room Doors.

I will ask Premises to consider the options available and prepare a feasibility study for this idea. Needless to say if it is feasible this would be on a replacement as needed basis and would take place over an extended period of time.

Pre Alert

The Pre Alert System is now in operation at all stations.

Peripheral sequence.

This was investigated and it was found that it could not be actioned so no time savings will be obtained from this initiative.

Manual Adjustments and exception reporting.

No progress at this stage I will keep you informed.

Standby Policy.

No progress at this stage I will keep you informed.

We thank Kevin for this feedback. Remember, do not make presumptions about anything read here—ask your OIC—they were at the meeting!



PROPOSALS TO CLOSE HORNDEAN, HAVANT AND W'VILLE

THE NEWS editions 7th, 14th, and 20th July
Concerning the proposals to close Horndean, Havant and Waterlooville

Letter from Jim Kellaway, Retired SubO Havant and Hampshire RFU Committee Member.

The Hampshire plan is for between 4 – 6000 new homes to be built every year for the next 20 years. We have already seen at Whitely and on the old Knowle Hospital site an increase in new properties; in both these areas Wickham and Tichfield were part of the PDA. Wickham was very nearly closed. Tichfield is closed; they would have attended at Whitely and also at the continuing build of properties in the Warsash area and Stubbington.

Editorial comment:

RFU policy maintains that small efficient local stations deliver the best results for our communities both strategically and economically. We will continue to encourage HFRS to adhere to this tenet.

If the various reports and press coverage are to be believed it is obvious that the county council and unitary authorities do not seem to have a coherent strategy for the next 20 years.

With these proposed cover changes in prospect the morale of firefighters on the RDS is being lowered and those that might join the RDS won't if they think their local station will be closing in the next 5 years.

A "super station" built to replace Horndean, Waterlooville and Havant would have to cover all these station grounds. Out as far as Littlegreen, Compton, and West Marden for West Sussex, Clanfield, Buriton, Butser area and A3M. Out as far as Denmead, Droxford and Hambledon. Havant at present cover the A3M and the A27 as far as Chichester. Havant also assist Emsworth and Hayling Island. Havant also have a large industrial estate in New Lane and in addition cover the third largest council housing estate in Europe.

To close these three stations will decentralise them from the risk areas, alter their flexibility and reduce value for money cover to surrounding stations.

A new "super station" would mean major road and bridge works in the A3M area to accommodate the scheme. It goes without saying that if such proposals were implemented they would only be successful by being crewed by W/T run on a 2/2/4 shift system. This would prove to be a burden on all council taxpayers in Hampshire. In the light of past mistakes by the Fire Authority I feel that "if it aint broke don't mend it" but try to improve on what we have. The time has come, I feel, for the retained of HFRS to become extremely vocal in arguing the way forward on any further reviews/decisions.

HFRS either want RDS firefighters or they don't. They should stop messing us about, or - sack us all and go for 100% utopia by re-employing all RDS firefighters as wholetime 2/2/4 duty system which would solve the entire problem at a stroke. However, realistically, I feel our management would be better running the Service on tried and tested principles rather than upsetting the people who give the overall commitment and value for money public service.

Regards Jim Kellaway

SUNSCREEN!



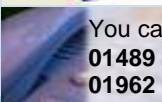
PPE is in effect the ultimate sunscreen, factor 100 probably. Hat, coat, thick trousers, knee boots, leather gloves, flash hood. So it would seem that it is unnecessary for the Service to provide protection from the suns elemental rays. However, for those times in the summer where PPE is relaxed, for example damping down the edges of a field fire or when stopping off at Carlo's for an ice cream on the way home, perhaps the Service should consider it's duty of care

CONTACT US

You can contact us through any of the following channels;



Our preferred means of contact is by email. You can send us an email at: admin@hrfu.org.uk



You can phone the RFU chairman, Rikki Noble on **01489 893980** or the RFU secretary, Andy Needham on **01962 723020**

FITNESS ASSESSMENTS

What is your experience of HFRS fitness assessments? Have you visited Occupational Health recently or has a WFTI visited your station?

Come online and give us your opinions now so that we can represent you better!