



The View From Here

Another month passes and by now, you have probably been thrilled by the governmental video sent to prepare for the changes ahead. To me two questions arise after I saw it—one was that video talked a lot about the ‘changes ahead’ but made no real effort to define what these were—an exotic cover on an empty book—and two, how much did it cost to say so little? I am all for keeping everyone informed and communicating what is going on—but if you are going to take up my drill night and stop me keeping up to date with how to be a fire fighter—can you make it worth my while!

What it means to be a Retained Fire Fighter



When the bells go down, we know what it means to you to serve your community—how it can mean lost customers, re-planning your day, cancelled engagements and missed meals—but still you attend. That is why we feel it so important to ensure that HFRS considers your efforts and your morale. We want to ensure that the long term benefits are more important than short term statistical goals and that above all the retained fire fighting service of Hampshire leads the changes and prospers. Join us now and help us fight for Hampshire’s Retained Fire Fighters.

Retirement Age

On the 30th July 2004 HFRS Principal Officers agreed to extend the current Grey Book provisions regarding the 55 year limit for service.

This means that extensions can be applied for coming up to 55 years, for 1 year at a time, and requests will be considered depending on medical and benefits to the service. This is an interim measure whilst awaiting changes to national guidance/Grey Book that we are sure will happen quite soon.

Those who are already in their extension period of 6 months can now apply to have a further extension of 1 year as per the criteria.

Hampshire RFU has been advocating the extension of the retirement age for several years so we see this as a positive and long-awaited move that will assist in providing cover to our communities and using the skills of retained personnel to the full.

However there is one cloud on the horizon. We understand that the FBU have objected to the extension of the retirement age for retained firefighters. We fail to understand their objection to the continued service of personnel who are fit and willing to continue contributing to the safety of their communities.





Working Time Regulation

Don't sign anything until you have read this!

The Working Time Regulation is a European Initiative aimed at improving the conditions of employees. One of the main thrusts of the WTR is to reduce sweat shops where employees are required to work vast numbers of hours a week. When this regulation is introduced the number of hours you will be able to work will be governmentally regulated. There are a number of measurements which can be used but a rule of thumb is 48 hours per week.

The problems with this are already being made apparent where BAA are advising their employees that they will not be able to be retained firefighters due to the repercussions on their 'main' job. Note: this is not a criticism of BAA who are merely following guidelines.

A workaround to this is that employees will be able to sign an opt-out form. This identifies that you understand there is a regulation but you take full responsibility for your actions in both your main and other employment and opt out of the Working Time Regulations.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue will soon be sending round a questionnaire to you requesting the number of hours you work on your full time job. They will advise that **they must** have this information. Before you complete anything we would like you to be fully informed and so offer the following advice:



The guidance issued by the DTI is as follows:

- If you have signed an opt-out declaration or intend to, you are not required to complete the questionnaire issued by the brigade.
- If you have not signed an opt-out declaration and wish to adhere to the WTR then you are required to complete the brigade questionnaire.

The RFU advice is as follows;

The ODPM are looking to analyse the effect the WTR will have on the Retained Duty System should the opt-out clause be withdrawn. To do this they will need the information the brigade are requesting from their employees. However it is unlikely that this is the reason the brigade are requesting employees to complete the form, a more sinister reason is likely. I would advise our membership to ask the brigade as to why they request this information if certain information is not in response we would suggest it would not be in our members interest to complete the questionnaire.

We will of course keep you informed and advise you any response from Hampshire Fire & Rescue.

Firefighting at Sea

There are soon to be new arrangements for fulfilling HFRS responsibility for firefighting at sea. In brief the current 150 W/T firefighters trained for marine incidents are going to be reduced to a team of 50.

The team will be called the Marine Incident Response Group and will come under a national umbrella and will be largely financed centrally. This team will be available to merge with other counties "merge teams". The big change is that the team will be open to all operational personnel including firefighters who operate under the retained duty system (RDS). Selection will be from applicants on the grounds of suitability only. Firefighters must have completed Ff development programme, BA and have at least four years to serve. Obviously the selection team will look at what candidates can bring to the job. The team will comprise 18 Officers 36 JO's and Ff's.

It is hoped to start operationally in April 2005. The role will require some additional commitment for initial training and the ongoing maintenance of competencies. Final details for remuneration are yet to be completed but could be similar to other specialist operational groups that currently exist.





Review of the Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System

Part one of the review was published recently by the Retained Review Team. The review team comprises representatives from the ODPM, Chief Fire Officers Association, Local Government Association, HM fire Service Inspectorate, RFU and the FBU. The FBU withdrew from the group at its last meeting; perhaps they did not like the emerging outcomes.

The report outlines measures to implement major changes that will:

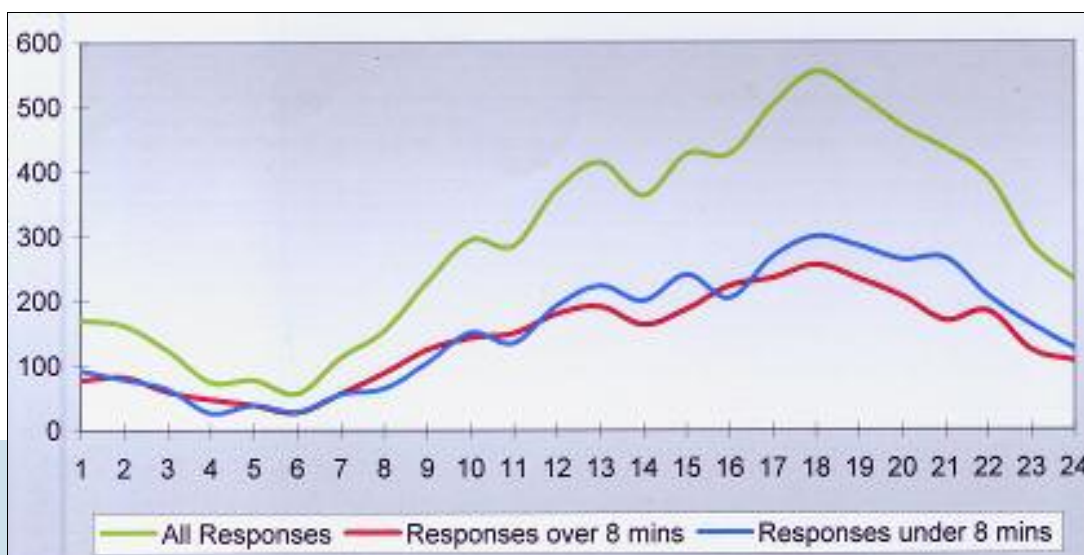
- Promote recruitment and retention
- Recognize the value of retained and raise public awareness
- Involve retained in the management role
- Engage with business to encourage the release for retained duties
- Involve retained firefighters in community safety
- Provide for more flexible use of retained personnel

The report was due to be presented to the Practitioners forum at the end of July 2004. The important issues are:

- To ensure the Practitioners Forum endorse and supports the report
- There is an implementation plan that the RFU is part of
- Retained firefighters are consulted.

As the report says *“the delivery of this report signals the beginning of the process, not its conclusion”*

Evaluation of response times to emergency calls



Timed response by retained stations

01/01/03—31/12/03

Extrapolated from the Federal Database

We reported last month on the start of the above project in which the Retained Firefighters Union have been consulted. The data has now been published and the project members are considering ways in which the 8/80 rule can be achieved. No suggestions have yet been made but we recognise the issues of achieving such a goal. By the nature of their geographical location in turning out and attending, retained stations are less likely to achieve 8/80. But there again we attend less calls so statistically it will not help the global targets by applying changes! We will let you know the developments. In the meantime, if you would like the above chart for your station with an explanation please contact Rikki Noble at rikki@office-home.demon.co.uk or on 01489 893980.



Bounty Payments for Whole Time Firefighters undertaking Retained Duties on a separate contract.

As you will have seen explained on the routine notice the Grey Book is quite explicit in excluding W/T firefighters who do retained duties from the bounty scheme for retained firefighters. It does not need much imagination to realise the reason for this, the current Grey Book is essentially an FBU document.

In Hampshire a retained firefighter who also happens to be employed wholetime within Hampshire or another county is on a completely separate retained contract. This is just the same as any other retained firefighter who follows a different occupation. The consensus is that this group of workers is discriminated against under the present term and conditions of employment. After all, these retained firefighters are eligible to join the retained pension scheme, work under all the conditions and responsibilities of other retained firefighters are dedicated to serving their communities in their own time. The service of these firefighters should be recognized in the normal way after 10 years retained service and on each of the 5 years following.

ODPM FiReControl Project

From HFRS web site (just so you know the facts)...

The project will replace the forty-six fire control rooms in England, based at local fire brigades, with nine new amalgamated Regional Control Centres. There will be one Regional Control Centre for the South East which will replace the existing control rooms in Kent, East Sussex, West Sussex, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight, Royal Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

More comments to follow.



This month sees us starting a new section in our newsletter—the Jargon Buster. We will take an acronym a month and try to break it down into its basic components. This month lets start at the top

Jargon Buster

IRMP

Not **In**competent **R**easons to **M**ake **P**olicies, IRMP is a government initiative to force fire brigades to be more accountable, flexible and develop community fire safety. Essentially, it cannot be argued that this is beneficial (and perhaps makes one wonder why it is not already being practised), however the speed and accountability measures are sometimes of concern.

Within IRMP the governments view is that retained fire fighters are a fantastic benefit which could be further developed to protect their communities. However with the pressure that is being put on Fire Services to be more efficient, they want to make better use of their wholetime workforce and make them more mobile...and we know where they may move them too. How this conflict will result no one can yet say, needless to say the RFU support improving safety cover in the community and making the service more efficient, however not at the expense of the retained service who are identified as the most cost effectivet component in the Fire Service.