

SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Thursday, 08 December 2005

HRFU
Serving the local community

The View From Here

The aim of job evaluation is to arrive at a fair and equitable pay and grading structure that accurately reflects the responsibilities of posts. This will then create a role based career structure within HFRS in line with IPDS. Rank to role is looking at the roles of individuals not the individuals themselves. This is logical and if the evaluation parameters are defined to take into account the role variations within a role all will be well. Using the relevant role map each post has been assessed for the level of conformance using two grades A and B. B being the higher level of conformance.

So what does this mean to you and I apart from soon to be released details on a change of badge and insignia? If you are a firefighter it means nothing at all, if you are a leading firefighter just a change of name to crew manager. If you are a sub officer however, there is a good chance that you will be affected by the rank to role. You will become a watch manager even though we do not have watches, so much for demilitarisation then. But there is more and it is disturbing. We have been informed that there will be at least 30 RDS Sub Officers who will be downgraded from a B to A.

At the Fire Authority Human Resources meeting on 29th November 2005 the committee were informed by DCO Curry that a small number of roles would move both up and down within the new organizational chart. Interestingly the committee enquired as to the current level of morale in the Service. The DCO replied that he was sensitive to the emotive nature of job evaluation and was in an ongoing process of communicating the changes to individuals.

We do not consider, by any means, that the downgrading 30 plus staff (who as officers in charge of Retained stations are responsible for the complete day to day management of these stations and their staff) is a small number and that if the DCO considered the level of morale to be at an acceptable level now it certainly would not be when affected individuals are informed!

RDS Sub Officers had an effective pay cut at the end of the FBU negotiated pay deal and now the Fire Authority via job evaluation are seeking to reduce their pay again. This group of employees is committed. They are committed to the Service and they are committed to their communities, they are committed to their staff. They do not just switch off at the end of a shift, they can't, a RDS SubO's job is 24/7. This evaluation is an insult to their integrity and it is disrespectful to the untold amount of unpaid time that every SubO willingly gives to the Service.

Does the Fire Authority really know the facts about how these changes will affect their RDS employees? Have they even been told? We do not believe that they would knowingly stab this group of loyal employees in the back.



**Merry Christmas to
all our readers**

The RFU newsletter—designed to educate,

RFU *part of the solution not the problem*



TAKE INTO ACCOUNT

Occasionally we have had to defend articles written in "Shout". Usually we find protestations a useful vehicle to start discussions and open dialogue. We welcome these exchanges and often better understanding results. What is really annoying is when we comment on what we feel is a particularly irrational action within HFRS, no reply is received and the action is repeated months later.

We are commenting on the recent I T department missive. Our IT department seem to be starting their Christmas system clean up early and have sent a notice to all those who, horror of horrors still have not used their HFRS email account.

We accept that the corporate role is to keep the IT system running at optimum but once again their zealously identifies that they have not been informed of how RDS stations use IT...under sufferance! We know that great plans are afoot and upgrades are planned, but until we see the results of this investment we will not be queuing on a drill night to wait for the slow responses of a wheezy old PC. Time is precious on drill nights, we do not have the time to access the PC and of course we are not required too outside of our contractual obligations.

As your role develops within HFRS there is more of a requirement to be in the communication loop, this is reflected in the inadequate admin allowance. However, not every firefighter understands how to use either the station PC or email. To 'expect' everyone to have an understanding is a worrying misconception. Training may well have been offered a while back, but this was not in-depth and too generic and new recruits are not offered any training within their initial course.

The zealous password considerations further complicate matters for non-pc literate users making the chances of them ever accessing their accounts become more and more unlikely. Online banks do not even require such stringent refreshing of the password!

Until every firefighter who requires IT and email training is assessed and trained we should not be surprised if the number of days which some accounts have been inactive keeps growing.

For those of you who do have email at home, we have provided a useful way in which you can 'bounce' all emails from your HFRS account straight into your personal email account. Visit the HRFU website for more details.



Note: If you do use email at home and want to monitor your HFRS email account then we have a great trick. Visit our website at www.hrfu.org.uk and look for the 'Outlook Email Rule' in the 'Toolbox' section on the left hand menu.

The Toolbox

Need help or advice?

Web feedback

Demonstration modules

Outlook Email Rule

FIRE CONFERENCE - NOVEMBER 2005 - MINISTERS SPEECH

The ODPM minister Jim Fitzpatrick MP was a firefighter in London between 1974 and 1997. He was an active member of the FBU becoming a member of the FBU NEC between 1988 and 1997. As a consequence of his involvement in the trade union movement he became increasingly active in the Labour Party.

The Minister made a speech to the Fire Conference in Manchester on the 3rd November 2005. An extract from this speech is below.

"Another major element we must have in place to support progress is a more effective negotiating machinery for the Fire and Rescue Service. Naturally smaller organizations like the RFU and FOA have an important and distinctive part to play in the service. They are also entitled to be recognized and play their part in national negotiations, as well as continuing to make their valuable contribution to public safety on the ground. Our preference is for voluntary reform. We have given our commitment on that. But let me make it clear, I hope and want to see progress on this issue very soon. NJC reform remains an important strand of the modernization programme".





MODERNISATION—Multi Level Entry

In June 2003 the report "Our Fire and Rescue Service" indicated our Governments intention of introducing multi level entry into the Service at a level appropriate to individuals qualifications and experience.

Many of you may now have had the presentation with regards to the changing recruitment system being rolled out within HFRS. In general this is a great step forward and although we all recognise that it will make it seem 'harder' to become an RDS firefighter, with proper coordination, the right resources and presenting the role in a positive light we feel that any retention problems can be averted. It is recognised in the ODPM document that fire services have got to work much harder to recruit RDS firefighters!

However, one of the most interesting parts of the presentation is the news that HFRS are working towards multi level entry. In essence this means that instead of just allowing entry at Firefighter level into HFRS an individual could potentially enter the fire service at Sub Officer level, Middle Management level or even higher. Could this possibly work?

- Susan Johnson has been appointed as CFO of Durham and Darlington FRS. She comes from a business background and was formerly Chief Executive of the Northern Business Forum.
- Richard Hewitt presently the Lt. Colonel (Commanding Officer) of the 7th Parachute Regiment has been appointed as DCFO of Suffolk FRS.



Many individuals who I have spoken, feel that they want to know that the officer in charge of the fire ground should have hands on experience and be in a position of trust. It is important to remember that a potential new Sub will not just step into the role, they will be trained and assessed over a period of time. It should also be considered that spending a number of years as a fire fighter does not necessarily a good sub make! If this encourages a better standard of management, it could be a good thing.

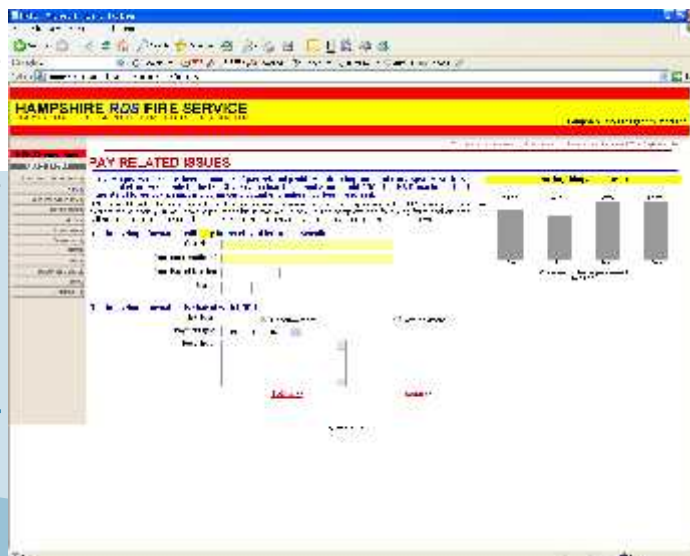
More excitingly, it is interesting to speculate on what the response would be to a suitably qualified RDS firefighter who applied for a HFRS senior or middle management post. One possible response would be refusal to consider the application on the grounds that the individual not been through the initial selection procedure for wholtime duty system firefighters.

For some years there has been a number of pay related problems affecting Retained Duty System Staff. A concerted effort was made in the last 3 years to clear these and around mid 2004 the HR Department felt the majority of large pay issues, including contractual anomalies had been resolved.

HRFU are still not totally convinced that the issues are minimised and so in conjunction with HFRS are monitoring the system more closely. If you have a payment issue we ask you to come online and tell us about it. Just complete a very simple form and an email will be sent to HFRS with your details.

In addition HRFU collect anonymised data to track trends as shown and establish what is happening.

Visit www.hrfu.org.uk to log your query.





FROM THE RFU NOVEMBER NEC MEETING

The fire service is changing; the standards of fire cover were originally designed to minimise the effects of the Luftwaffe, little has changed in 60 years until now. As everyone knows, society is changing and in many ways becoming safer. It is a fact that risks have fallen; it is a fact that there are fewer major fires. Consequently change is inevitable.

The Fire Service has been tasked with initiating; developing and pushing this modernising change through. But are they capable of managing the changes or are they too entrenched in the archaic traditions of the service to see the potential? Can change developed from within an organization truly be politic free? Will the best choices really be made when the individuals driving the change may be subversively affected? In other words will change be truly altruistic?

In addition, within the fire service is perhaps the least modernised and most militant union in the country, a union that in many areas of the country still displays an unnatural control over senior management.

The recent strikes in Suffolk showed how the RFU were willing to pioneer the change and spearhead offering emergency cover outside of current remits. During the industrial action emergency cover was available throughout the county and the military were not used.

Time and time again RDS firefighters have displayed that they are willing to provide cover whatever the circumstances. They constantly deliver above and beyond expectations and on numerous occasions are stepping in to ensure emergency cover is offered throughout a county when the WDS staffing is removed. Perhaps because this is not our primary employment, it is not our primary wage income, because we don't **have** to be firefighters, RDS personnel tend to be those who quite simply love the job and providing cover to our local communities.

Senior management throughout the country has taken RDS for granted time and time again. "Fire service on the cheap" is how the government identifies us and the fact that throughout the country RDS personnel are 30% under staffed and yet no national or combined action has been undertaken to try to alleviate this shortfall clearly displays how RDS are not taken seriously.



And yet it seems that in more and more areas it will be RDS firefighters who will be most affected by all the heralded new changes. Whether under the veil of cost savings, better utilization of resources or modernization it seems time and again that RDS are considered a soft target. We will not strike, and however upset we do get, we will turn out for our communities.

Storm clouds are gathering and now more than ever you should be in tune with your fire service and ensure you understand exactly what is happening both locally and nationally.

JUST A THOUGHT

Do you think that someone in Government posed the question:

" So you have 70% of the country covered by these 'Retained' fire fighters who are available just when needed and otherwise go about their daily tasks but, elsewhere we pay others just to sit and wait for an emergency calls?"

That's not right, if we are paying them, they should be working—send them out to do something. How about installing smoke alarms!"

NVQ'S

Just to bring to your attention the opportunity recently announced in routine notices. If you want to study for an NVQ, HFRS are currently offering the opportunity to a small number of retained fire fighters. Pass your NVQ and who know you may be able to just transfer straight across. Do be aware that the opportunity is offered on the understanding that it is a lot of work!



SENIOR MANAGEMENT REVIEW

[CONFIDENTIAL]

The Fire Authority Human Resources Committee met on the 8th September 2005. Item 16 on the agenda was entitled "Senior Management Review – Final Report (confidential)". The purpose of the item was to receive the report of the Chief Officer recommending to the Authority outcomes of the Senior Management Review. The press and public were excluded from the room whilst this item was discussed. The minute book from the meeting also fails to contain the resolution because of confidentiality.

The Fire Authority Finance and General Purposes Committee met on the 21st October 2005. Hidden away under item 5, 1.1 Budget Monitoring, appears an entry as follows – Senior Management Review, authorisation HR 8/9/5, £70,000 (Modernisation). The Fire Authority HR Committee on 8/9/05 appears to have authorised payments to the SMT of £70,000.



Under 5, 2.2 Wholetime firefighters pay and allowances. A sentence toward the end of the paragraph reads, " Senior Management Review £52,000 in 2005/6, full year effect of £62,000, which also includes the corporate allowances not previously covered specifically.

Under 5, 2.6 Support staff pay. "Additional allowances (£18,000 in2005/6, full year effect £20.000 in 2006/7) have been agreed following the Senior Management Review referred to in paragraph 2.2.

It appears that for the year 2006/7 the SMT will receive in addition to their salaries a further £82,000 in allowances.

What are these allowances for?

- How and why is this possible under the heading of Modernisation?
- Finally, why hide the payments under "Support staff" and "Wholetime firefighter pay and allowances" headings if the payments are fully justified?

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY

Ah CFS! The promises, the promises! Well it looks like things may actually be changing and the opportunity for RDS to finally undertake CFS within their local areas may be here.

Although before we start to congratulate HFRS too much, let us not forget stations such as Yately who have been pioneering CFS long before HFRS evens started thinking about it and now have covered the majority of their station area with smoke alarms at no cost to HFRS!

But back to the corporate beast, we are pleased to report that HFRS are starting to move funds towards CFS so that RDS stations will be able to start actively undertaking Home Fire Safety Checks in the next two or three months. (This does not include the post incident visits which we feel under most circumstances will be impractical).



Training for Home Fire Safety Visits is now being provided throughout the County.

How will you be recompensed for this? HFRS are considering paying you a 'per house' cost? This will then provide a structure for those individuals who do not want to work alone to be able to work with partners and those who are happy working alone to be able to do this also.

After much consideration HRFU have decided to support HFRS policy in undertaking lone working. So long as the proper training, facilities and protocol are provided to individuals we cannot see any reason why fire personal visiting a house alone are any different than plumbers, electricians, decorators, carpet layers, builders, glaziers, window cleaners, washing machine and cooker repairers, computer installers, gardeners, home tutors, cleaners we think you get the idea!

Continued overleaf.....



FROM THE RFU WEBSITE



Due to the timescales of local IRMPs/Safety Plans the UK Fire Service is witnessing the proposed closure of a number of Retained Fire Stations in various brigades. It is interesting to note that at present these specific stations have no RFU members, being made up of either non-union or alternative union personnel.

We suggest you keep a close eye on the development of these proposed cuts specifically in relation to how hard the reductions are fought. The reason for this is to highlight the fact that the RFU has no conflicts of interests in that we represent only personnel with a RDS contract. This means that should a Retained station be proposed to close due to the gain of another duty system, the RFU would still provide 100% support to fight any reduction.

Non-RFU Retained stations need to think long and hard as to whether they are really better off without our backing. The proposed cuts are a wake-up call that arrives too late for some. To fall back on RFU support you need to be in the union sooner rather than later!

Admin Support for RDS stations

Over at least the last five years we have consistently pressed for local admin support for RDS stations. Whilst our argument for support has been accepted the increased support offered has not been local. We have seen streamlined office systems but no real help when it is needed on station on a drill night. Station admin covers a multitude of local issues from stores to leave management etc and it occupies more than the three-hours allocated.

A proposal has been accepted by SMT to increase admin support for RDS stations. This, as the report says is urgent so plans are in place to recruit three station support staff. The Fire Authority HR Committee will consider the increase in staff on 29th November 2005.



However, the question arises about how will the extra admin staff be used. Subsumed into the Group Managers office?

We hope not. Watch this space.....

CFS cont...

HFRS role is to provide CFS to the residents and visitors of Hampshire as cost effectively as possible – it is our money they are spending and so allowing lone working ensures this. It is important to stress that currently no one will be forced to lone work and there will be special exception facilities for identified dwellings.

Home Fire Safety Checks will be limited to a set number a week to ensure that the county budget will not be exhausted within a few months.

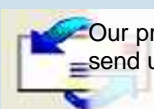
We also brought to the attention of the CFS department that your availability might be seasonally limited. For example a station with many rural personnel may not be able to undertake any Home Fire Safety Visits during July and August but have loads of spare time in February. This therefore has to be factored in.

Budget for HFSC	05/06	£147K
	06/07	£147K
	07/08	£300K

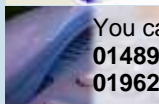
Is this enough? Let us wait and see.

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**