



SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Friday, 29 December 2006



The View From Here

Many of the meetings we have attended recently have dwelt on this years changes, for good and bad the changes have affected us all. However one thing is becoming more apparent, don't relax - there is always going to be a lot more in the future!

We exist now in an organisation of change. HFRS is not aiming for a new plateau to reach in which it will then rest for 10 years. The service, like any other business needs to be leaner and able to change more quickly to legislation, community requirements and the landscape in which it exists. In addition the old 'military' style of management has gone replaced by a new modern system .

The Fire Service can no longer be shrouded in mystery as to how it operates but it has to be open, transparent and above all else accountable. The arena in which it now operates is political and as we all know, politics demand quick solutions and immediate results. Its not always about suffering in the short term for the long term advantages - political life is measured in months not years. Its a results measured world where quick wins are the order of the day.

Good or bad, many people dislike change. Personally, I think if you work for HFRS (as with many other public-run organisations) change will become a standard component of your work life. Some of these changes you may relish as they will fit in comfortably with where you want to develop in the Fire Services others may not be so comfortable, may even be detrimental and will never be comfortable.

As the new year approaches I think we should expect more and regular change throughout this year and the next and the one after that! Not all of these changes will be great and not all will be beneficial but you can be sure that when invited, HRFU will be representing the views of retained employees loudly and vociferously.

May we wish all subscribers to "Shout" and all members of Hampshires Retained Firefighters Union a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



Marlie Farm,

On behalf of all of our members, we offer our support and sympathy to the families and friends of the operational personnel who lost their lives so tragically in the incident at Marlie Farm, Ringmer near Lewes, East Sussex on the 3rd December 2006.

Crystal Balls?



OK, here a few things that will affect you in 2007 - a new payment structure for Retained Fire Fighters which will affect each and everyone of us. The possibility that your primary employer may say "You will have to provide less Fire Service duty". An opportunity to get more from your Fire Service in the way of training and skills. Want to know more? Subscribe now to this newsletter - and be one step ahead!

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

RFU *part of the solution not the problem*



The Return Of The Working Time Directive

It seems like only yesterday that we last completed the Working Time Directive questionnaire, whereby HFRS took the opportunity to assess the amount of time everyone worked (or allow them to opt out) - the work/life balance as it became known.

We completed the forms and beat the EU directive back over to Brussels.

However, its back and its angry with a much more determined Regulation.

Let us be very clear, this is not an HFRS designed imposition, but a legally binding regulation and you can be sure that your other primary employers will be approaching you with regards to the Working Time Directive very soon.

So what is WTD?

The core of it states:

- an organisation does not make unreasonable demands on an employee's time and an employee gets time off from work!
- And what does it mean for us employees – remember not to read this as just HFRS but consider that your primary employer will be most interested in the 'additional' work you do for HFRS.
- A limit of an average of 48 hours a week which a worker can be required to work (although workers can choose to work more if they want to by signing an opt out form) N.B: The rest breaks still apply even if an opt out form is signed.
- A right for night workers to receive free health assessments if requested
- A right to 11 hours rest a day
- A right to 24 hours off in every 7 days
- A right to an in-work, 20 minute unpaid rest break if the working day is longer than 6 hours. N.B: Grey book staff receive a paid lunch break of up to 1 hour.
- A right to 4 weeks paid leave per year, although HFRS provide more than this.



This is all averaged over a reference period of usually 17 weeks.

HFRS is currently hosting meetings to discuss WTD and its effects to the service. First let us consider how if you read the conditions above literally and introduced them how it could affect RDS Firefighters.

WTD and you

The Working Time Directive in essence is a legally binding regulation which can be perceived as either complimentary or intrusive into your personal life. Introduced to ensure your employer cannot overwork you thus essentially legislating against sweat shops and the like the WTD now removes your right to choose how much you work, introducing a consideration that you can work too much and that this is not beneficial.

Not a terrible idea, but after the great idea was formulated the nuts and bolts then seem to be have been thrown together without nearly as much thought. Let us look at just a few anomalies:

Anomaly 1

Firefighter A is retained at Romsey fire station and is also a first responder which is operated by HFRS. The total number of hours they work both fire fighting and responding have to be considered within their total hours worked for the WTD. So, when their primary employer considers WTD and ensure this employer is not working too much, all of their HFRS hours fire fighting and responding have to be considered.

Firefighter B is retained at Bishops Waltham fire station and is also a first responder which is operated by a local volunteer scheme. When his primary employer has to consider the total hours worked, the first responding hours do not have to be considered within WTD even though they are undertaking exactly the same roles.



Anomaly 2

Firefighter C works as a carer for their local community at weekends, this job involves little more than visiting elderly residents and ensuring they are OK, possibly doing a little washing up and tidying but because they are paid for this role this time will have to be considered within WTD when their primary employer asks.

At the weekend Firefighter D drives to Yorkshire where they go rock climbing and fell running. As this is an unpaid hobby, even though it is strenuous exercise and long hours it does not have to be considered for WTD when their employer asks.

Anomaly 3

Firefighter E is a retained fire fighter in Winchester. On Saturday and Sunday they stay close to the fire station to be available in case of any fire calls. Though 'available' this time is not considered WTD.

Next door to Firefighter E is an HFRS Workshop Mechanic, Mr F. As he is duty mechanic, he has to remain close to home available to respond to any breakdowns in HFRS. His time is considered WTD even though his response and availability is exactly the same as Firefighter E.

Anomaly 4

Note the regulation detail above "A right to 24 hours off in every 7 days". WTD does not apply to one of your employers but all of your working hours irrespective who is employing you, consequently this should be read as "A right to 24 hours off all employment within 7 days". For many of us, the only 24 hours we have off work a week (excepting HFRS duties) is Sunday so strictly speaking we would not be able to offer our RDS duties during this "24 hours off" - so would RDS stations have to 'close' on Sundays?

So taking those very weak structured directive it is HFRS task as an employer to consider how WTD should be considered in the organisation. They have been sitting down with representatives throughout HFRS to discuss how the WTD could be introduced into the service. Essentially they have three choices - ignore the directive and be liable for any corporate or personal litigation which may result. Enforce the directive to the absolute letter of the law or find a mid way point which is workable but legal.

Honestly speaking, trying to understand the Working Time Directive is boring, but it is an all pervasive regulation which will affect every employee in the Country. You will be well advised to take note when WTD issues are discussed - your employment life may depend on it! Nothing is decided yet, but stay tuned!



Editors Personal View Point

The WTD is being looked at by businesses because originally the union AMICUS noted apparent differences between what European Commission officials had intended the directive to cover, and how it had been enshrined into law over here. Interesting as I believe a union should represent the viewpoints of its members. I wonder how many AMICUS members realised that their union was pushing to reduce their earning potential!

I have a number of issues with WTR, the most prevalent one being that I feel I should have the right to do what I want with my life with a correct legal infrastructure to protect and aid me if required - but its still my life. Ultimately WTD may reduce your earning potential, but many of us may feel that we want this opportunity. For example:

- A young couple saving for their first house may want to work every hour 'that god sends' to enable them to realise their dreams earlier.
- An individual may actually love their job and enjoy working.
- A company going through a boom period may want to offer its employees the potential to 'make hay while the sun shines' over an extended period.

You do not blame a barman for making someone into an alcoholic, so it seems unfair to blame the employer for the occasional employee whose social and/or family life collapses due to work commitments. So long as the individual can choose to work just 48 hours a week without repercussions then I feel the law is doing its job.

This law was originally designed to protect workers from exploitation by a few unscrupulous employers. Once again an enormous hammer has been brought in to crack a very small nut.

Finally, let us be frank. Does the government really feel that those few employers who this legislation is designed for, those who are unscrupulously forcing their employees to work long hours for a low wage, are really going to observe this new legislation hold their hands up and be overcome by a new morality and observance of the law? No! They will forge their documentation and be forced further underground, preying (nee employing) and bullying the socially disadvantaged who they are employing.



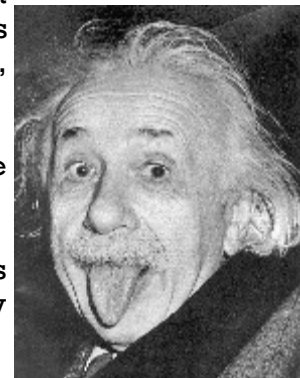
PDRS - ASK FOR YOURS NOW!

PDRS for those of you who are not yet aware is a system whereby every individual employee will have the opportunity to sit down every year with the line manager and establish what they want to achieve in the fire service and what the fire service requires from them.

You should be aware it is not a 'shopping trip' for courses that you want to do but a review of the balance between yours and HFRS requirements. There is no point in having very FF at an RDS station a BAI! However, neither are the courses limited to just what HFRS can provide. If there is a course that you want to do that is provided externally and the advantages would benefit the fire service, help may be offered.

And if you are not interested in developing your skills within the fire service, this is fine also - but at least someone has checked with you.

It is a scheme which we fully endorse and encourage all of our members to take full advantage of it. It needs everyone to take part to really reveal its benefits so ask your line manager today for your PDRS!



RDS STRATEGY UPDATE

Fire Services get a kick up the gluteus maximus

Back in February 2005 the Government published a document "The Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System" which reviewed the RDS system and essentially identified that RDS staff were treated poorly, were not being used to their full potential and had to be an integral component of the new Fire Service. The document made 51 recommendations for Fire Services to action.

We attended some meetings to consider these, but frankly despite the best efforts of those managing the project, it was evident that there was little support from on high. The meetings felt like we were going through the motions rather than having any teeth to tackle the issues.

This all changed a few months ago when the government appointed a new individual to shake up the service. Fire Services were told

"Sort out these issues quickly - or we will!"

A 'new' project board has been formed and some radical projects are underway. HFRS have a good spread of members within each project board as well as RFU representation. We hope that these project boards get sufficient resources to carry out their tasks efficiently and that the developments will truly reflect HFRS commitment to the 51 recommendations and aren't just a paper exercise to 'tick a box'.

CONTRIBUTERS CORNER

I just thought I would leave this area blank in recognition of everyone who said "I would like to write an article for your newsletter" and whose contribution we still await...."

Rural retained boost

Did anyone read the article in FRS21 about Shropshire's rural firefighters getting a 'floating' wholtime team to help them out?

What are your thoughts, we will be contacting our colleagues in Shropshire to bring you more information next month. But firstly what is a "Rural Firefighter", this seems a dangerous term to use. Secondly, does it not seem that this is a solution based on Shropshire failing to action a proper recruitment program?

We will try to bring you more next month.

To join send an email to admin@hrfu.org.uk | contact your local representative | call 01489 893980 |