



# SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

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**HRFU**  
Serving the local community

## The View From Here

The New Year brings in many changes both personally and for the service. I have been extremely fortunate to be one of the successful transferees from RDS to WDS – perhaps transfer is not exactly correct as ‘in addition’ would describe my work with HFRS more accurately as I am still undertaking my RDS role. Importantly for union members, despite rumours to the contrary; I am very active in my RFU union role as well as attending as many meetings as before.

My greater knowledge of the WDS Fire fighter role as well as the RDS Fire fighter role allows me to bring another dimension to my awareness of how HFRS works and provide you with a better representative service. So this year as in every year the RFU will be ensuring that we represent you throughout HFRS.

Do also note that this year we will be making a concerted effort to get out to the stations and meet are members and attract new members. **So please do contact us if you would like a station visit.**



## HFRS Economics



This month our feature article is based around the finance arrangements for HFRS, written to give you a better understanding of the services position and why changes are coming in. We have tried as much as possible to remove any ‘union slant’ instead giving you an unbiased article to make up your own mind so please do bear this in mind when reading, by writing and explaining we do not necessarily support or condone the content!

Just this week on the radio it was announced that the recession was ‘officially’ over and things are looking better. Do be assured this does not mean that suddenly the poor financial forecasts have improved—the Country still has a massive debt (£870 billion) and this will still take decades to pay off removing money from the public purse to service these debts!

We would like to thank Wendy Lambert for taking the time to provide most of this article!

## Working Time Directive

### Working Time Challenge



Britain’s “opt-out” from European rules setting the length of the working week faces a challenge in Brussels.

The Spanish EU presidency has pledged to make a revised Working Time Directive part of a European “factory of rights”.

Spanish Socialist MEP’s, with the support of their Labour colleagues and trade unions, have urged the Commission to scrap Britain’s opt-out from the legislation that sets a maximum working week of 48 hours.

**From The Daily Telegraph, Monday January 25th 2010**

**RFU Comment:** We did advise you that we may have won the battle but not the war when the opt out was allowed early last year. Be assured we shall keep you informed and fight on your behalf.

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

**RFU** *part of the solution not the problem*



## Background

Initially it is good to know that the service is in a relatively good financial position. Through competent strategic management over the last few years although not awash with money, it certainly is not broke.

HFRS gets its money from two sources: Government grant (43%) which includes business rates, and Council Tax (57%). Next financial year the service will receive the 1.9% increase in government grant that was agreed before the economic downturn, but from then on have no idea what will happen in the following years. With the National Debt predicted to cost households £6000 a year each there will not be as much cash to go around. The Fire Service will at the very least face no increase to its budget (which is arguably a fall as the cost of living goes up), however it has also been rumoured that it may well see its grant reduced by up to 5% every year. It is also worth noting that the Government will cap how much money can be drawn from local taxes so the fall in the Government grant cannot be 'made up' through increasing Council Tax.

So, Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service is going to have to become a leaner meaner machine and essentially wring more out of every pound it gets. How will it plan to do this? The Chief has already advised that redundancies although not ruled out are a last option but before this and to reduce the threat the service has do much to improve its efficiency.



## WDS

The Efficient and Flexible Crewing project is seen as an extremely important way to save the service money. Careful analysis and desktop trials have shown that it is possible for the HFRS to deliver the same service with fewer employees by using its staff more efficiently. With better utilisation of its staff HFRS consider they can manage with up to 60 fewer full time WDS firefighters. To evaluate the possibility of this in the real world, grey book secondment opportunities have been offered to take up to 15 WDS fire fighters off front line fire fighting and place them in other strategic roles. Testing the reduction in fire fighters in this way means that, if things do look really dire they can be returned to active duties and the claim re-evaluated. But with 60 less fire fighters how can the service continue to provide the correct cover at its Whole Time stations? The keyword is 'Flexibility'; the service considers that by viewing its employees as a service wide resource and not just station based they can create efficiencies by moving fire fighters from over crewed shifts to under crewed shifts in a managed way and when there are no excess fire fighters create a staff bank and use individuals who want to do additional hours. It works on paper but of course getting models created in an ideal world transferring across to actual station level can be a challenging process.



With regards to redundancies, it is predicted that about 20 fire fighters leave the service every year so by not replacing those that leave a natural fall in available fire fighters will result.

Evidently there is no doubt that HFRS will be expecting their WDS fire fighters to be more flexible and more itinerant in the future to allow them to be more productive.



## Green Book

All of HFRS will need to be carefully evaluated to ensure each department works at maximum efficiency and Green Book areas are already feeling the effects. Should a Green Book employee leave the service, their role is not automatically filled as departments must get Director Level approval to replace them and all departments will be expected to do more for less!

In addition we see the shedding of the Deputy Chiefs role in Senior Management.

## RDS

So what of the RDS? It is accepted that the RDS are probably one of the most efficient resources any business can have – instantly available – instantly returnable. But this does not mean we are above any service reviews. Efficiency savings will be expected from us as well. There are a number of important considerations when reviewing the RDS budget.

From the services point of view there are a number of inherent inefficiencies built in to the RDS system.

- Alerting a station and getting twice as many people turning up to the station than is actually required.
- Even though a station may be up to full establishment there is still no guarantee of it being available for example, there is nothing to stop enough RDS employees at a specific station from booking unavailable and taking pumps off the run.
- As RDS crews are employed by the hour, any additional resource requirements of them following HFRS initiative comes at an increase in costs. For example HFRS perceive HFSV undertaken by WDS crews as essentially free, the crews are already available and being paid within the yearly forecasted budget, however for RDS to undertake HFSV's the cost is 'in addition' to anything forecasted. Not a problem for the occasional one-off but when you consider HFSV is undertaken at every RDS station it becomes a large and onerous additional expense.
- Training outside of drill nights (such as at weekends) comes at an additional expense

So what sort of things may HFRS consider to make the RDS more efficient? A number of options are being considered. The service may like to restrict the number of people who turn out when the alerters go off. One way to do this will be to only have the required amount of RDS fire fighters available to turn out as is required. This could mean that availability would be managed not just in an 'as many as possible' scenario but 'as many as is required'.

## Did you know?

- The RDS establishment numbers (the number from which when reached equates to every role in every RDS station being filled) have not been changed since they were set after the Second World War.
- The budget has only ever been sufficient to fund the average numbers of RDS fire fighters actually in post.
- In the early 1990's the RDS budget was consistently overspent. In 1993 a formula was established that linked the RDS budget to the number of operational incidents that they attend. This formula operated well until the last couple of years when we have been successful in increasing the numbers of RDS fire fighters whilst the numbers of incidents has fallen due to the success of strategies such as CFS and Arson reduction.
- When the formula was established the RDS budget was split with 40% of the costs being training and drill night based and 60% incident based. This has now swung completely round and with the increase in training expectations, HFRS, opportunities and a fairer system which identifies RDS crews being paid for CFS work the budget is now split with 80% of the costs being ancillary costs and just 20% incident based. Consequently the formula has been ended and the RDS pay budget managed in the same way as any other staff group.
- Whilst the formula was operating there was some budget excess which was used to help other projects. For example establishing the Emergency Catering and Incident Support teams.





RDS fire fighters would not therefore strive to be available whenever possible but instead could be contractually bound to be available at mutually agreed times. This then starts to consider the salary option of payment. You may for example be contractually bound to supply 80 hours a month to the service and in that time they can call on you for incidents or to undertake CFS activities.

This infrastructure along with the RMS could also be used to identify those that are not supplying their full commitment of time and look at the efficiencies at individual stations. Do they need as many people as are currently employed? Is everyone providing their agreed contractual hours?

Reviewing contracts and offering a more flexible model of employment would also mean that stations could look at employing individuals for less than the 75% cover if the time offered was crucial to keeping a station on the run.

## RFU Viewpoint

HRFU have worked extremely hard to build up a good working relationship with HFRS and be realistic in our approach and feedback to all projects. This has proved fruitful as our constructive feedback is often reflected in the final results. It is for this reason that we are not going to throw the whole idea of salaries and station reviews out and sulk in a corner nor are we going to rile you with threats of a failing service. HFRS has a contractual obligation to provide suitable fire cover within the borders of Hampshire and it is clear both cost and resource wise that this is only possible with an RDS service as an integral component of the service. We are looking forward to the challenges of working with the service in investigating possible future employment systems and helping to evaluate them. We should not expect the RDS to be insulated from the very real economic pressures which will be experienced by HFRS.

This being said we are extremely aware that the current system does work and in addition it makes the very best of allowing individuals to live with the Fire Service in their domestic lives in a convenient and flexible way. There is a fundamental difference between WDS fire fighters who are employed to work at a specific station and be available at the services beck and call during set hours whereas RDS fire fighters have the service interrupt their lives with no prior warning. To expect RDS fire fighters to have to guarantee availability during set hours with limited or no flexibility is an aberration to what is currently identified and understood as an RDS fire fighter and will be palatable to few.

The discussion around salaries has the precept that it must be at nil cost to the service. That is, if a new salary system creates an increase in yearly net pay for one individual it must be offset by a fall in pay for another. Now it cannot be argued that if one individual works more hours than another then they should be paid more but let us be clear - we will fight hard to prevent a fall in pay for any of our members! Pay must reflect the commitment that an RDS fire fighter offers the service in making themselves available not necessarily attending incidents. We have always maintained that the RDS fire fighter who makes themselves available over a weekend at a quiet station shows as much dedication as the RDS fire fighter who does the same at a busy station knowing the chances of a shout are most likely.

We will work with you to inform you of developments, considerations and changes to help you understand and adjust to what will undoubtedly be a very different environment from the one you are currently employed in. But we will also ensure that the service is aware that any initial quick savings which undermine the RDS role will quickly be offset by individuals leaving the service demoralised - RDS fire fighters have more choice to leave than their vocational colleagues.

Whatever outcomes are on the way, be aware that the next two years will show a dramatic change in how we work with the service and how it perceives us and most likely the method of payments. As usual we urge all RDS Fire Fighters to join the RFU to allow us the funding to fight for your job and conditions.

## Next Newsletter

In many respects this article may well prompt more questions than it answers. We acknowledge that and will bring you details of other aspects and changes due.

- **Contracts** : new flexible contracts are currently being discussed with a variety of salary schemes. Next month we shall provide more details.
- **projectEngage** : Being part of the service or just being an excuse for an unpalatable change—projectEngage will give you the opportunity to have your say.
- Visit our website to view our response to “Getting To Incidents In Rural Areas Faster”. It s radical—but we feel should be discussed more—let us no what you think. Next month we shall provide a summary.