



SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Thursday, 15 July 2010

HRFU
Serving the local community

The View From Here

Take a Deep Breath.....

This edition of SHOUT heralds a new era in the Fire Service and one which we are watching extremely closely. Like many things in life it is not the easy times that tests a relationship but the times when things are not quite so easy—over the past year relationships have been good, with the union being consulted and included with all HFRS developments. We reflected this in our feedback on many external audits - the service was communicating well and being inclusive with its representative bodies and there were no surprises.

How things seem to have changed in just a few weeks—we are more than aware of the impending financial forecast—but the services response so far has been to make rash, ill informed decisions without proper consultation with us and their staff.

In the last two weeks we have had:

- **Surprise #1:** Advice that testing of phased alerters at certain stations will start—there has been no discussion with unions despite the fact that the agreement stated only desk top trials would be used to test new RMS systems
- **Surprise #2:** Sacking of Station Cleaners— With no real chance to consider and despite our protestations and request that at least two months notice be given the service failed in giving any notice and went ahead based around extremely flaky business logic
- **Surprise #3:** Introduction of a Staff Bank—with no consultation with the unions

Just two weeks and all of the hard work we have put in to creating solid cohesive working partnerships teeters on the edge.

We call upon HFRS Senior Management to slow down, take a deep breath and get back to where we were. We all have time to plan together for the tough times ahead by being inclusive, through successful partnerships and working closely with all staff and representative bodies. If you do this the whole work force can help with the ambitious cuts and targets which will need to be set. If you fail, if you alienate your workforce, however much you cut, slash and claw back savings you will not get the results and we shall all feel the failure.

One final word which I believe every employee expects—whilst we are considering the cutbacks which will have to be made, we must consider the words of Ingvar Kamprad who runs a fairly successful company called Ikea:

“If there is such a thing as good leadership, it is to give a good example.”

In this edition

We have heard over the past few months how members have been wondering where the union is and what have we been doing.

We would encourage every member to visit our website, as it is here that we keep you informed of day to day developments. In this edition however we provide an abridged version of the response we submitted with

regards to the new proposed Salary Scheme—the full version can be found online. IN addition we respond to some of the recent initiatives. Remember visit our website to keep abreast of developments



**IMPORTANT
INFORMATION REF THE
NEW STAFF BANK IS ON
THE LAST PAGE. PLEASE
READ BEFORE
APPLYING.**

hrfu.org.uk

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



Salary Scheme



FSi Payroll

You would have to have been on an incredibly long and far away holiday to have missed any discussion about the Salary Scheme. Be it Bruce's presentation of the Hampshire proposal or just gossip around the station. HRFU published and forwarded our official response to the Salary

Scheme and we provide an abridged version of the feedback here. For the full version, visit the website.

This document provides feedback on the recently proposed Salary Scheme for RDS Staff discussed by HFRS.

The first point to raise regarding the proposed scheme is that it is not in fact a salary scheme - RDS fire fighters will be paid different rates based on the activity of the station - this proposal is in fact a remuneration scheme and is based on the service's view of 'perverse incentive' in that calculations are still derived from turnout and attendances.

The proposal has been presented as the solution to many RDS issues; individual's availability, station availability, retention of staff and management of contracted hours. None of these are achievable within the specifics of a salary proposal. What it has done though is to highlight deficiencies across the service. The RFU believe these can be addressed in other ways and that the proposed salary scheme will not deliver the results promised. It will in fact add an additional problem to the mix and alienate even more the RDS workforce.

Improved Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment

There is no evidence to suggest within this proposal that the scheme will improve recruitment. Indeed it is the RFU experience that suggests that monetary reward is the furthest thing from most applicants to the RDS duty system. The main driver in most cases is that persons wish to serve their community and are often surprised that they will get paid for it as well. That is not to say that RDS staff should not be appropriately paid and on a comparative rate to whole time.

Retention

The RFU doubt whether on any exit interviews the reason for leaving was the money and would invite evidence to suggest this. Issues are normally about persons having:

A change of career outside of the RDS, Change of availability, Family commitments, which could include sick family member, Change marital status/partnership, death of a family member.

Improved Operational Availability

The proposed system is making unsubstantiated or researched claims that availability will improve. Personnel only have so many hours available. If they are not available it does not matter how you say you will pay them, they still will not be available.

The issue that has really been identified here is that HFRS are paying personnel for availability they are not giving. Simple solution, check personnel's contract against their availability and pay them the appropriate retainer fee. This is a performance management issue and not a pay issue.

Best Practise

The RFU would support the widely utilised business practise of identifying areas where things are working well and creating 'best practise'. HFRS need to look at their stations that are performing well and achieving 24/7 cover. What are these stations doing to achieve this and can we put this together into a 'Best Practise' document for other stations to use? Bearing in mind that what works on one station may not necessarily work on another. However, a combination of ideas might work.

This would have the additional benefit of only affecting those stations that require additional resources and help, leaving those alone that are working well, rather than a broad brush approach which would upset the majority of the RDS workforce.



Rota Systems

HFRS have a number of rota systems out there and as above these should form part of the Best Practice document for RDS.

A forced rota system and the proposal of restricting riders to 5 will have the greatest impact on self-employed personnel. The idea behind this shows a shocking misunderstanding of how many RDS employees work - their work for the most part is not geared around a standard work pattern. In the most part their work drives their availability and has to be extremely flexible, but because of this flexibility the self-employed are the ones most likely to give day cover when there is none.

Once again a broad stroke approach runs the very real chance of affecting more fire fighters detrimentally than it will benefit others.

Improved Life/Work Balance

The idea that only five persons would be available at any time required for an appliance is flawed as far as the RFU are concerned. These under the pretence that personnel could have more time off, still show available but not respond. The whole proposal that those who are booked to ride but need time off must phone around to get those who are available to cover, is a complete anathema to how the RMS system has introduced a more professional employee/employer benefitting system. It is much more robust, organised, interactive, multi accessed professional way of working. This would encroach more on family life and work life with constantly having to phone around to arrange cover as well as creating an additional management burden. The RMS system already gives the ability for individuals to see who is around and whether or not they have the ability to postpone booking off if the crewing will allow.

Limiting riders also ignores the dynamic crewing which OIC's have to undertake on a turnout. Turning in and finding out that the incident is a barn fire and likely to be of extended duration will mean different people may be able to ride than if it is an RTC. Or the OIC's may make a rapid decision on who is riding based on experience. The restriction of 5 riders is not needed.

Flawed Evidence

The RFU felt that in the presentations many assumptions and anecdotal evidence was offered. We are not aware of any in-depth questionnaire to RDS employees which could support such allegations consequently the whole system on employee acceptance is still unpredictable.

Shared Experience Levels

The service already has a service order on experience levels in the RDS and ensuring experience is shared out, why is this not being applied? Again this is an area of performance management, not a reflection of a salary scheme. Rota systems will give you the ability to share experience around on responding crews, it does not require it to be linked to a salary scheme.

Conclusion

For all of the above the RFU rejects the proposed salary scheme as is. The proposal is detrimental to our membership, showing in some cases significant reductions in pay. It will fail to deliver on its claims and will create, in our opinion, a worse working environment than we currently have. This will result in a gross cumulative loss for the service in the longer term.

The RFU have offered two alternative schemes which have shown favour with our members. However, in support of HFRS desire and drive to create a more efficient RDS system, we would invite them to undertake a similar project such as the four station review which was driven by and fully involved the workforce and created some really tangible benefits with workforce buy in.



HFRS Sack Station Cleaners

HFRS have recently taken the decision to dismiss its Station Cleaners at RDS stations for the reasons that it will save money passing the job onto outside contractors. They have told us that they are quite within their legal rights to cancel the contracts with no formal warning to the individuals concerned. We feel that there are a number of holes in their logic:



- Firstly, outside cleaners are rarely cheaper than local solutions; after the cleaner is supplied with transport, the cleaner is paid and the agency have taken their cut and charged on to the service we would be extremely surprised if the same standard of cleanliness was reached for the same cost.
- Outside cleaners will not be able to move pumps or work in the pump bays so will only have a limited area of responsibility—thus requiring cleaning duties to be paid additionally for HFRS employees to complete the task.

Better management of the current system would have ensured that pay was fair and equitable and properly monitored. But the part which we feel has been most appallingly managed is the notice given to exiting cleaners, many of whom have been undertaking their cleaning duties for over twenty years. To give them a months notice is, irrespective of the legal standpoint, immoral and seems to be a panic decision with scant disregard for the staff.

By the services own admission, this is a fairly small group of people so, if the financial savings exist, they will be quite small. Surely in acknowledgment of the great service shown over many years, and appreciating that many of these people may be reliant on this additional pay, the service could have afforded giving them a few months notice?

The RFU is currently in discussion with HFRS about this.

Phased Alerters

In a recent meeting a senior member of staff advised us that the services control software could not accept any updates, due to its aged state, in particular the facility to provide phased alerters could not yet be supported. Yet stations have recently been advised that phased alerters will soon be tested.

Apart from the surprise that suddenly the impossible has been made possible, we are most disappointed that the 'No Surprise' culture advertised by SMT should be thrown out. As a matter of courtesy we would at least have expected formal notice of this proposal. And it also goes against the current agreement with the RMS systems that everything being looked at and considered would only be theoretically considered and desktop tested.

As a Representative Body we would expect to have discussed with the service the contractual and expected effects this will have on station crews—this has been ignored.

Staff Bank

Please DO NOT sign the recent invitation to sign up for the staff bank. The RFU are fundamentally NOT opposed to the staff bank so long as it supports unexpected shortfall requirements of staff (and not long term additional staffing requirements), it makes financial sense for the Service and offers RDS and WDS staff a great opportunity to earn additional income. However, at this stage the service have not revealed the expected contracts of employment and until we can be assured they do not represent a drop in your contract standards we cannot support the scheme—yet!



Invite Us To Your Station

With so much change going on around the service you may be wondering how the Retained Service fits in with the future of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service?

Well why not invite us to your station one evening for a visit and we will be happy to give you a 'warts and all' view.

Consider the new RMS system, Efficient and Flexible Crewing, Transfer Opportunities, New Fitness Requirements, Home Fire Safety Visits - what are the threats and the opportunities!

Contact us now at admin@hrfu.org.uk or phone 0798 555 9243 to arrange your visit.

