



Friday 16 July 2004

Part Of The Solution

## The View From Here

The Fire Service is currently undergoing one of its most radical changes since its inception. What does this all mean to you and what will YOUR fire service look like in three years time? To help you understand we are going to start to include a series of articles that offer our own opinion on how you and the RFU plan to be part of it. Please note that any predictions is to a degree, as accurate as gazing into the bottom of a tea cup, but we do feel that not enough is currently being undertaken by HFRS to communicate these changes to the firefighters so read on....



It is probably first best to report that at this stage no one really knows how the full effects of the scheduled changes will affect the fire service. HFRS, like all other brigades is being led by the government – and lets face it, when have they ever known what is going on! Following the recent wholetime fire fighters strike the government has had its attention drawn to the service and sees this as an opportunity to bring in, what it feels are needed changes. It is probably true that if the strike had not

occurred the government would still have at some stage undertaken this task – it has just been bought forward.

Essentially the Fire Service is being changed from its old military style, brigade structure to a more corporate model. That is the service will be run like a company. This has some benefits in it removes a lot of old dust from the cupboards and makes every role more identified. In addition, to conform to government regulations established procedures for employee's development and protection are introduced as well. Arguably these changes should make for a fairer brigade. That is the theory and the advantages what are the drawbacks? Well for one the service will be based on a more cost and statistically aware basis—that is that all decisions will have 'cost benefits' assigned to them – can this work for the Fire Service?

You may be able to apply efficiency formulas to a factory that produces 'units' but what about something so indefinable as a shout – when will it happen? Where will it happen? How big will it be?

Remember - Statistics: The only science that enables different experts using the same figures to draw different conclusions!

More comments and observations to follow...

## Project—Improve response times to incidents.

The RFU is happy to note that we were invited to be involved in the above project run by DO Brown. The project has been defined (in the title) and was next presented to interested bodies (ourselves included).

Essentially HFRS wants to deliver on the 8/80 promise getting to 80% of emergency calls within 8 minutes. It seems apparent to us that this will heavily involve the retained service and may affect us most, as our fire grounds tend to be larger and our tipping out time is also longer. We will be watching this project closely and will be meeting again with DO Brown to discuss its developments.

We are hopeful that HFRS will continue to carry out full and proper consultation on all future projects.

## On your behalf

With the announcement of the Chiefs retirement, we sent a letter of appreciation from the Hampshire RFU and its members. In essence it thanked him for his service to Hampshire Fire and Rescue and noted how much relationships between the RFU and HFRS had improved during his tenure.



## Working For You

Unions—once considered the home of flat capped, mild drinking northerners—have now developed into an essential part of business. Here in Hampshire RFU we are frequently invited to meetings so that HFRS can get to know and understand the retained firefighters viewpoint. Arguably, we improve on the role of management where we provide non-biased feedback direct from the retained firefighter to the management 'straight from the horses mouth'.

Wherever your working roles or conditions are likely to be affected we ensure that your rights are not walked over. HFRS have probably never deliberately made a bullying move, but they can make mistakes, they can sometimes not understand guidance documents and they can sometimes make decisions that do not fully appreciate the retained fire fighters role. This is where we step in, fighting the corner of the individual, our members and any retained firefighter.

And let us be honest, your role needs representation more than most. A retained firefighter is driven by a moral sense of duty to their community, they make more lifestyle sacrifices than Wholetimers and yet are not employed directly day to day so have to work harder to keep abreast of changes and provide proper feedback. You work within a station within a community and have a closes kinship with your direct team rather than with Hampshire Fire and Rescue

Because of this it is often felt that retained firefighters have changes pushed on them as the soft option. It is harder for you to resist change. This is why you need someone 'in your corner'!

We do not and will not support strike action. We believe that this is not conducive to good working relationships, is not professional and is not sympathetic to our members views that the community they live in must be protected.

Not being able to threaten however does not make us toothless. We are backed by the RFU which provides us with the necessary legal and statutory advice and believe that intelligent discussion achieves better results—brains instead of brawn!

We are also non-political.

If you are not already a member, please do seriously consider joining the RFU. Your representation makes our bargaining point stronger and your funds will enable us to improve on our communication to you. With the many major changes due within the Fire Service you need to be represented now more than ever.

Being a union member does not make you a radical set on destabilising management but rather a concerned individual who wants to be part of the developments within HFRS.

To join please email [rikki@office-home.demon.co.uk](mailto:rikki@office-home.demon.co.uk) with your name and address, phone 01489 893980 or Andy Needham on 01962 723020

**RFU**

*Part of the solution—not the problem*

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## What we've been up to this month

The RFU is committed to representing you whenever we have the opportunity. With the changes undergoing this therefore means that we are going to a lot of meetings! If you have any specific skills which you feel may help us with knowledge on these meetings—or you would like to represent the RFU and attend any of these meetings your self—we would love to hear from you.

Over the last few months these include:

- HFRS/RFU Consultation Meeting
- IRMP Presentation
- Job Evaluation Meeting
- Improving Response Times
- Winchester Day Crewing
- HFRS Consultation Meeting
- Audit Commission Interview
- PPC Meeting

Forthcoming Proposal Meetings

- Best Value Review of Workshops
- Retained Working Group Meetings
- Local Diversity Group Meetings
- Health and Safety Committee
- County Councillors Meetings