



# SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Friday, 03 June 2005

**RFU**  
Serving the community

## The View From Here

**Reaction To Change:** On Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> May 2005 Hampshire RFU Chair and Secretary attended the meeting between HFRS senior management and all RDS OiC's. The meeting primarily was to discuss response times, that is 8/80, and the trials of the rota riding system, naturally the retained management system was mentioned as well. SDO Kevin Butcher, DCFO Alan House and DO Fred Brown attended the meeting.

The meeting was radical and refreshingly open. We will not discuss what was covered in the meeting, as it is down to your OIC to pass on the information. However, we do recognise that some of the ideas will cause quite some debate and consternation and so felt that we should post our response now.

The meeting involved everyone and it was not a case of being advised of what was happening. Feedback was requested and an open forum allowed the ideas to be discussed (although it was noted that Mr House was quite assertive). It was emphasised that none of the ideas were confirmed and much discussion, consideration and negotiation will need to be undertaken before any of the ideas come close to being trialled. However, the fact that a cultural barrier was being approached, the grey book, in a bid to achieve the goal of a more efficient Fire Service should be welcomed. In addition, the fact that all RDS stations were invited to participate with idea creation is one we have been supporting and promoting for many years and we applaud this HFRS initiative.



Working towards a responsive modern fire service requires everyone to pull in the same direction and to achieve this we all have to feel that we are part of the same fire service and are individually valued essential units within it.

Including RDS firefighters within this true consultation is a great way to get buy-in.

Concerning the ideas you will hear being discussed; we would like to stress that we have not as yet been formally consulted or have given approval for any change. It is too early for that. We are sure that HFRS will continue this open approach and will invite our views should any of the ideas be selected or investigated further. In addition, it will be very important that you be involved and have the opportunity to provide your own health and safety feedback and views. We would urge you however to consider the positive aspects of change and work with it and establish how it can best work for you.

Be assured that providing initiatives are correctly consulted, trialled and have a positive impact on RDS firefighters we will work with HFRS in everyway to help achieve success. When however, we feel that your conditions are being eroded, health and safety concerns are not being properly considered or the quality of service is falling for our communities and at RDS stations we shall be both vociferous and tenacious in ensuring things are corrected.



### The man behind the rank

This month we include part one of our fascinating interview with your chief.

Looking for a promotion? Find out here what to buy him for lunch! Find out why he thinks the ODPM does not go far enough in recognising RDS firefighters and what is the 'perfect' Fire Service.

We were offered over an hour to interview the chief. Starting this month you can read his response.

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

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



## The Lone Worker Conundrum

It has not been any secret that the Community Fire Safety Department would like one day, to have only one person carrying out home visits. It is twice as cost effective as two firefighters making the visit and obviously means that twice the number of visits can be carried out consequently more chance of HFRS hitting its target of getting a smoke alarm in every house by 2010 and a safer community.

As a union our members regularly voice to us their worries and concerns carrying out house visits unaccompanied and so our stand currently is not to support such a development. CFS have a strong argument identifying that a house can have many 'individuals' visiting it such as plumbers and electricians and that they experience no problems so the Firefighters arguments, they feel, do not stand up.



This is a good argument, but it recently came to light that apparently, within HFRS, the Occupational Health Department practise a non-lone worker policy! However strong the arguments they have for this policy, does it not seem a bit back to front that HFRS does not expect some of its staff to attend to Firefighters on their own but that Firefighters are expected to see members of the public alone? We shall keep you informed.

## Payment error (fyi)

This was received 13th May 2005

I am writing a brief note to keep you informed of an issue which has arisen in this month's retained pay run. Unfortunately a batch of claims was processed twice by HCC staff last month, resulting in about 70 retained staff being overpaid in their April 05 pay. Adjustments have been put through to correct the overpayment in this month's pay (May05).

Where the overpayment amounts were above £100 we have split the correction over two months, half being recovered in May 05 and half in Jun 05 pay runs. All affected staff have been informed by individual letters to home addresses.

You will be aware that we have just begun running retained pay on the new system, and whilst I am pleased this error was not a fault in the new system, I appreciate that this does not detract from the inconvenience these errors can cause.

We would appreciate staff co-operation at this time in checking their payslips carefully and notifying HR Operations Department should they have any queries or concerns regarding their pay.

We are currently looking for volunteers to provide us with feedback as to what is happening at your station. Spread throughout the county and meeting once a week makes coordinating your views tricky to say the least. To be truly effective and represent you we need to know what you think.

We are trying to build a list of station representatives that we can keep in contact with via email. We can then email you and ask such questions as:

What does your station think about the new Rota Riding System?  
How much has your Admin increased in the last year?

For more information, please contact [info@hrfu.org.uk](mailto:info@hrfu.org.uk)

Thank you in advance.



## How much?

The Retained Management System has been described as step one in a developing system which will audit RDS firefighters more accurately ensuring Health & Safety issues are considered, accuracy of payments and fairness at station level. But at what cost? We have mentioned many times that we feel it is not the most efficient of systems and to emphasise the point carried out the following calculation, the details of which have been verified as 'fair' by a senior officer.

In conclusion, when the current system has collected enough details to identify all the anomalies and a 'proper' system can be accurately specified, HFRS could easily go shopping for an IT solution with a budget of almost £16,000.00 knowing that it would be paid back in just 3 months. We do hope that this will be the result and we can finally say goodbye to the current manual system.

Step	Description	Cost per week
1	Every RDS Firefighter takes 5 minutes to complete the RMS system a week and there are 600 RDS firefighters	£500.00
2	Every OIC or Station Manager takes an hour a week to complete the RMS and there are 45 retained stations	£540.00
3	It is estimated that it takes admin staff one day to then process this information. Say 4 admin staff at £9.00 an hour	£288.00
4	Total per week costing	£1,328.00

Have we got your views right? Come



## Interview with Chief fire Officer John Bonney

Recently we were afforded the opportunity to interview your Chief Fire Officer John Bonney for an article in "Shout". In his own words "*your publication is seen as informative and thought provoking and importantly fair in the issues that it covers so I am happy to be associated with it and to offer myself for this interview*". So suitably pumped up and feeling proud we put on our best Jeremy Paxman impersonation and kicked off. There were many ways to present the results but we hope the following, with our notes included give you a good insight into both the Chief and his views of the developing HFRS, this is part one continuing next month....

### Favourite Band? Food? Holiday Destination?

Pasta and Italian Food, Van Morrison & Texas, Nepal and Cornwall



### What made you want to join the Fire Service and when you joined did you plan to be a chief?

As a 21-year-old graduate, I was looking for some excitement and something that had a practical effect. Being from a working class background, my family expected me after university, to be something like a lawyer so was surprised by my choice. However rather than ambitious I am more someone who gets bored easily and wanted a real challenge so the Fire Service fitted me well. I never had dreams of becoming a Chief until I left Gloucestershire as a dep for Hampshire, only then did I believe that it may be possible. To be fair, if I was more career orientated I could have become a Chief sooner but wanted to be with a Fire Service I respected.

### What made you apply to be Chief at Hampshire Fire and Rescue?

Having seen a number of brigades I felt that Hampshire was a good fire service with a great potential. The potential to be a respected player in the national scene and an iconic fire service that other brigades will look to as an example.



### Can you name for me two of your most important accomplishments as a senior manager in the Fire Service?

- 1) Setting up new style officer development programme in London
- 2) Dealing with the aftermath of a major chemical incident that flooded. It took two weeks and was truly hands on.

John felt that this showed two contrasting elements in the Fire Service as well, one as a manager of an organisation that required internal people skills and one as an operational fire fighter – getting dirty!

### Currently the government is putting a tremendous amount of pressure on you to make multiple and sometimes major changes across Hampshire Fire and Rescue. Do you feel that each and every one of these changes is necessary and that the guiding forces (the Government Ministers) are dead right with their decisions?

No, not every change is beneficial. Although change is due I think that what is currently occurring is too much change in too many areas. Things are being missed and the opportunity to coordinate change is lost, sometimes you will experience two sets of changes that may appear to be odds with one another. There is therefore conflict and anxieties rise. Evidently the government have an agenda and they are pushing this through hoping to build up a momentum to enable more change. However, the Government do listen and I think that some of this change is being pulled back a bit now to enable the dust to settle. As identified there are many, many Government changes introduced almost daily and part of my job is to insulate the organisation from this change and percolate the right ones to the right areas of the service.



### What one major IRMP implementation do you feel has been most properly thought through and provides the most beneficial guide to HFRS?

Genuinely trialling things such as the co-responder etc, trials do work although sometimes the outcomes are not quite as expected. For example, moving the pumps at Havant and Waterlooville has resulted in us thinking about the shift patterns and how we use our resources to match the profile of risk. Changes are not easy and we identify that we sometimes are not seen to discuss and communicate our intentions, We do recognise this and hope that by liaising more closely with those affected in future we may be seen to be better at managing trials.



### Have you ever been or experienced life as a Retained Firefighter?

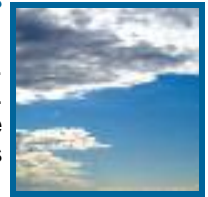
On a number of incidents in Gloucestershire I had the opportunity of working with retained fire fighters. In Gloucestershire 50% of the service is retained so we obviously met up quite often. My view however is that sometimes too much distinction is made between Retained and Wholetime firefighters. As far as I am concerned these two are only methods of delivery of a service and in fact are part of the same service just from a different sources. I recognise that the only people working the sorts of hours I put in as the Chief in the fire service are retained fire fighters because of their dual responsibilities.



## Interview with Chief fire Officer John Bonney cont...

### As a senior manager in HFRS, how would you introduce a major change to your working teams role or work description?

I would engage my people more and ensure that they are well informed and part of the change. Currently Hampshire Fire and Rescue have not engaged with their staff or communicated nearly enough. I recognise that to successfully develop we need to involve our staff more and talk with them. We are now extremely keen to implement better communication and the new Communications Department is proof of this.



Over the last few months we have become increasingly concerned about some of the recent changes pursued by management. We stress that we welcome development and modernisation and accept that not all change can be beneficial to RDS Firefighters in particular. However, many of the changes that are being effectively forced on us, seem to be ill thought through and designed more to be beneficial for internal data harvesting and monitoring rather than actively improving us as firefighters or the service we offer our communities. Consider two topics in particular; BA personal face masks and the RMS.

### Do you get advised of such systems or do you hear about them and can you comment on this?

The example BA: We were advised by experts outside of HFRS that the interpretation of the law would mean that every firefighter would need their own issue face mask. Litigation is becoming more and more a consideration for us so we undertook this task. As it turns out the interpretation was incorrect and we actually see it as a strength that we identified this and reverted to the original system rather than continuing with the more complicated system.



Ultimately, we do not deliberately make mistakes and do not identify trials as a way of surreptitiously introducing news systems into working practise. We recognise that communication is not always as could as it should be with trials and hope in future to discuss more. Hence one of the reasons we formerly recognised the RFU was to look to work with them in the future to improve the levels of communications and understand better the needs of retained firefighters.

We also like to consider the whole aspect of change and do hear what is reported back. CFS for example; HFRS wanted to recompense the retained crews from Havant and Winchester for the disruption during the station movements so offered them this initiative rather than what many perceived as more obvious to use the wholetime resource.

**8/80:** When an alerter goes off, every RDS firefighter in the county attempts to get to the fire station and turn out as quickly and as safely as possible. On mounting the pump, the driver and crew then makes every effort to get to the scene of the emergency as quickly and as safely as possible taking into account what that actual emergency is.

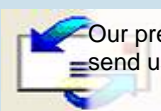
### Whereas we accept that you have stressed that stations should not feel under any pressure, do you not agree that by the sheer nature of the statistic unreal pressures would be felt at stations?

8/80 is a standard that we aspire to and that we can present to the public. The public have a right to know that when they call on our services, when they should be able to expect our arrival. The original 5,5 8 was not publicly friendly or easily communicated. If 8/80 is not met then it is not the retained's fault and I am not asking people to travel faster but to think differently. 8/80 is a organisation wide initiative and its success should be considered before the wheels turn on your appliance. From the moment of call, can we control activate the alerter system more efficiently (for example before capturing the full address details of the caller)? Will a rota system enable riders to mount the pump any quicker (with those not 'on' helping them)? However, no additional action can be taken after the wheels turn. 8/80 is an organisational initiative affecting control, vehicle procurement, incident type and local initiatives. It is an LPI (Local Performance Indicator) for measuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the Fire Service and is one who's affects filter through the whole service. However, the figure is used to show people how we are doing and to effectively promote the Fire Service externally and not used as a measurement internally.

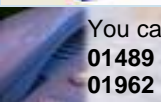


## CONTACT US

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](mailto:admin@hrfu.org.uk)



You can phone the RFU chairman, Rikki Noble on **01489 893980** or the RFU secretary, Andy Needham on **01962 723020**

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH.....

Cant wait until next month? The full text to this interview can be found on our website, links from the home page...

[www.hrfu.org.uk](http://www.hrfu.org.uk)