



SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Tuesday, 14 March 2006

HRFU
Serving the local community

The View From Here

Noted by our absence? After a few months leave, the newsletter returns. Our apologies for not filling your dark winter evenings but our time has been taken up with the Rank To Role Evaluation process. We would love to report a great success but as far as the HRFU are concerned it is still an open issue.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue maintain that the process was rigorous, robust and safe. They feel that Sub Officers in charge of retained stations work a role which equates to Watch Manager A's.

Our argument is that although the process was written and developed with the full understanding of how the Wholetime system works, it had little ability to either understand, manage or even identify how Retained OIC's operate. Indeed, it is becoming more and more clear that some Senior officers have little understanding or experience of the Retained System and its intrinsic differences from the Wholetime service.

Let us be clear, HFRU support every effort HFRS make in levelling the playing field between RDS and WDS staff. But, when you consider two sets of employees who, although delivering the same high service actually approach the task from diametrically opposite positions, it is clear that you cannot evaluate the two together.

This is not about comparing role importance with WDS, its not about measuring competence or ability with WDS . It is about recognising that the two actually go about service delivery in non-comparable ways and so cannot and should not be evaluated in the same way.



Lone Worker Policy

We have recently attended a working group who are tasked with developing HFRS lone worker policy. It was advised to HRFU representatives it is expected that wherever safe and practicable, HFRS firefighters will be undertaking HFSC alone from July 2006 .

As mentioned before we accept this inevitably and look forward to working with HFRS in making sure that the policy recognises our members worries and establishes a system which helps you feel confident in undertaking your new role and raised profile in the community.

FBU GETS IT WRONG!



Whoops—who got their facts wrong and prematurely released! See the back page for the Pensions Fiasco!

New Web Utility—online wage enquiry

Every month it seems that payment errors abound around HFRS, but how bad is the situation? In partnership with HFRS we ask **ALL** RDS Firefighters who experience a payment error, to come online to our home page, click on the link to the left and register the issue. We send the information direct to HFRS so that they can answer your question, but also collect anonymised data to log ourselves and keep track on how many problems occur. We will let you know the results in 6 months!!



PAYMENT ERRORS

Help us to help you, report your wage errors here, HFRS get advised and we can monitor the situation.

[Click here](#)

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

RFU *part of the solution not the problem*



STATION ADMIN

As we noted in our last issue there is a proposal to provide admin assistance to ease the ever growing administrative burden placed on RDS OIC's . We now have more details. It is proposed to roll out station based admin support to RDS stations. This will be achieved by initially employing eight full time staff. It is intended to provide this to clusters of stations such that all stations are supported by 2007/08. The stated aim is to help support the IRMP proposals. For those interested the costs will be £121,000 in 2006/07 and £176, 000 in 2007/08.

The concept of station administrative assistant is an interesting one. Some of the projects and developments filtering through now from HFRS are well thought through and certainly project management is showing signs of improving. But these new concepts and projects are being layered on top of an already strained and archaic system.

It is time that HFRS bit the bullet and ran a project which evaluated station based admin from the ground up across all Hampshire stations - RDS and WDS—and considered a county wide update. It constantly amazes us how many disparate systems run in SHQ and how little HFRS know about its workforce. How many different databases they have running with no cross referencing. How hard it can be to capture just basic reports about employees.



Currently HFRS are building all of their projects on sand and the true benefits will never be properly realised as the success every new project realises comes from an additional administrative overhead which has a finite limit. Ultimately it will be those at the pit face that will be forced to absorb just one more bit of data capture, one more bit of form filling or incorporate one more task into their already hectic and unappreciated roles!

RFU representing you and your station

At last years budget consultation meeting we pressed for additional maintenance funds for RDS stations. This resulted in £100,000 pounds of capital money being made available in addition to the maintenance budget for 2005/06.

This year, at the budget consultation meeting on 16th January 2006, we suggested that this investment should continue. I am delighted to say that our input again received a positive response because the Fire and Rescue Authority has approved an annual capital sum of £50,000 specifically allocated for building improvements at RDS stations.

As noted by CFO Bonney, nearly all of HFRS stations were built in the early 1970's and many are now showing signs of wear and tear. However there is no annual budgetary provision to replace all RDS stations. As the Chief noted, even if one station a year was rebuilt, it would still be 40 years before they are all replaced!

CFO Bonney advised that although the condition of Hampshire's station buildings are not as bad as those in many other fire and rescue authorities, maybe it was time to look at different methods of accommodating our front-line resources. A wholetime example is the daytime location of a pump and crew at Popley Community Centre, and maybe HFRS will consider managing its station assets on industrial estates or other shared resources.



New Contracts—so what?

As part of the rank to role process, it is essential for HFRS to issue new contracts to every employer.

The process of issuing new contracts has been taken full advantage of by Susan Templeton and her team by not just recycling the old archaic versions but by recomposing the contracts and trying to track down anomalies and factual errors and get every contract back into order.

Susan has spent much time with us ironing out misunderstandings and grey areas and striving to create a contract which contains a lot more recognition for how RDS employees actually work.

Have HFRS got it right? As with many things what HFRS want and what the unions want can sometimes be at odds blurred with legal requirements, however we are happy to report that your new contracts are a lot more reflective of RDS requirements.

Do you need to read them? Of course we should encourage you to but we recognise that like car and holiday insurance terms and conditions, and mortgage and loans small print very few of us read the small print.



We are hoping that HFRS will be supplying you with a information sheet with your contract just to explain the contract. If you have any questions do contact ourselves or HFRS HR.



RDS Bounty Payments

The RDS Bounty Payments is a long service bounty, paid at five yearly intervals from ten years service. It is a loyalty reward and was originally introduced because there was no pension.

As an RDS pension is being introduced the RDS Bounty Payment is being phased out—instead of receiving the bounty HFRS will be paying into a nationally recognised pension fund for you. This agreement and the withdrawal of the bounty is as result of the agreement made by the FBU with the National Employers after the 2003/4 strikes.

Unfortunately according to the RFU many RDS personnel seemed to be unaware of this change when the new pension scheme comes into force on 6th April 2006, and this again demonstrated the lack of consultation and involvement of RDS personnel in their conditions of service. What pension scheme is being offered? What are its benefits? Can you opt out?

One of the major bones of contention is what happens to your bounty payment already earned. It has been mooted that bounty payments will end on the 6th April 2006 and we have already received reports of Firefighters who's bounty is due just a few days after this date—will they receive nothing at all? It may be a slight simplification but you can imagine that HFRS have been putting money aside into a 'bounty account' every time you get paid—where will this money go?

In late February 2006 we raised this issue with HFRS at a recent JTU meeting. Dave Curry suggested that HFRS would be looking at paying RDS Firefighters a pro rata 'bonus' following the introduction of the pension and that this was being ratified at a meeting later in the week. This however has not been confirmed to us. If successful what will these payments be? Will every firefighter get a pro rata payment even if they have just been in a few months or will there be cut off points. If so, what about those firefighters just a few weeks off from the cut off?

FBU GETS IT WRONG!



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We will keep you informed....

Feedback from HFRS HR

We asked HFRS for their review of this article. Shella Smith was good enough to respond as follows .

“In relation to Bounty Payments, you are right that negotiations continue at a national level and we are looking at the financial impact of a pro-rata payment to close the bounty payment scheme. We will however have to wait for ODPM guidance on this issue which is not expected for at least a month. We will keep RDS staff aware of any progress through Routine Notice entries.”

RDS PENSIONS—UPDATE Payments

It is interesting to note that the FBU have, following their recall conference, recommended acceptance of the new pension proposals to their membership. We also note that the FBU are promoting the fact that the new pension arrangements were solely negotiated by the FBU. Well that's great, because we know exactly who to blame for this disaster for RDS personnel serving now and for those who become RDS firefighters in the future.

How could any competent negotiators negotiate away the level of death and injury benefits that are necessary and agree to replace them with a scheme based solely on RDS earnings rather than on equivalent wholetime earnings?

Fortunately the problem has been partly solved following a meeting between the RFU General Secretary and the Minister Jim Fitzpatrick on 13th February. The Minister has agreed to protect injury and death benefits based on equivalent wholetime earnings as they are at present for all currently serving RDS personnel who transfer into the new scheme. However, all new RDS firefighters from 6th April 2006 will be subject to the new rules and whether a member of the scheme or not have almost nothing in the event of serious injury or death. In these circumstances how could anyone recommend a RDS career to any prospective employee? This is a huge disincentive to become a RDS firefighter and it will, at one fell swoop, undo all the good recruitment work that has been done recently. “Come and make your community safer, but it may be at a huge cost to your family” - not a very good recruitment message.

“Come and make your community safer, but it may be at a huge cost to your family”

Bounty years that have been earned will not be honoured when the scheme is phased out at the inception of the new pension scheme. So if you have earned four years and eleven months bounty at 6th April 2006, kiss it goodbye. This demonstrates the lack of consultation with RDS personnel on the conditions of service. Thank you FBU.



The RFU has written to the National employers requesting an urgent review of the arrangements for ending the bounty payment. Jim Fitzpatrick has advised us that he supports early discussions between the RFU and the National Employers, and he has written to them to see to facilitate an early meeting.

Once again the RFU are having to pick up the pieces and try to make something sensible for RDS personnel out of the FBU shambles.



Changing the RMS Availability Sheet - instructions to ALL RDS employees

During negotiations surrounding the implementation of the RMS it was accepted that it was crucial for the success of the system that personnel, on a continuous basis, amend the RMS availability sheets to accurately reflect crewing levels and personal commitment. This requires, when possible, attending the station outside of contracted hours and outside of the Grey Book definition of authorised duty. The RMS Service Order deems that for the purpose outlined above HFRS will consider personnel on duty. So we thought. Even though SDO Kevin Butcher personally sanctioned a local agreement, that was mutually beneficial, HR now disagrees with the agreement and indicates that personnel attending stations outside of contractual commitment are **NOT** on authorised duty and will not be covered in the event of an accident. The new contracts align with the Grey Book definition and discussions have so far failed to remedy the position HR is taking.

- It is imperative that RDS personnel should consider their position before attending the station to amend/update the RMS board outside of Grey Book defined authorised duty hours.
- OIC,s and Crew Managers should not attend stations to assess crewing levels etc outside of Grey Book defined authorised duty hours without assessing the risk.

We consider that HFRS has a duty of care to all RDS personnel to individually inform them of the current situation.

PENSIONS LATEST

We are not ones for political mud slinging however we do feel that we should reply to a recent email distributed within HFRS:

The message is clear, ONLY FBU RETAINED MEMBERS are entitled to join the existing Fireman's Pension Scheme under the recent House of Lords Ruling.

Maybe now more than ever would be a good time for Retained firefighters to join the FBU.

We asked for Derek Chadbon (General Secretary of the RFU) for a response:

"I raised the issue of the misinformation circulating about who is covered by the recent House of Lords ruling on retained pension rights at today's meeting at the ODPM offices of the Firefighters' Pension Committee. The Chair of the meeting, Martin Hill confirmed:

- Whatever the outcome of these proceedings, these will apply to all RDS, irrespective of union membership
- Backdated pension rights will not be limited to those serving RDS who put in Tribunal applications
- The previous "Preston" test cases on "part-time" pension rights that took many years to go through the Courts and ended up at the European Court of Justice is a clear precedent as this applied to all those covered by the ruling, irrespective of union membership and completion of a Tribunal applications
- It would clearly be inappropriate to restrict the outcome to only those who had applied

Matters will become clearer when we know if the House of Lords decision is going to go back to the original Employment Tribunal, or if the Employers/ODPM will agree to a resolution. The Government will ensure this will involve all stakeholder unions.

We will keep members informed.

In the meantime, if you have left the Service, or intend to leave shortly, and have not completed an IT1 Tribunal Form, then you are advised to do so within three months of leaving, by contacting RFU Head Office.

Attempts to mislead you into believing pension backdating is restricted to any particular trade union membership is wrong."

We also thank CFO Bonney for supporting this position by publicly releasing a Dear Chief Officer letter from Martin Hill of the ODPM's Firefighters pension team which supports this view. You can read this document at our website either from the news archive or library resource.

We trust that the FBU will carry out stringent checks before next releasing any further misleading statements—its does none of us any favours.

“
Attempts to mislead you into believing pension backdating is restricted to any particular trade union membership is wrong
 ”
Derek Chadbon
 General Secretary
 RFU

“
there will be no restrictions on who may have membership. It will not be necessary for a RDS firefighter to establish that he/she had submitted a claim to the Tribunal or was a member of any particular union or association
 ”
Martin Hill
 Firefighters Pension Team
 ODPM