

# SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Tuesday, 03 October 2006

**HRFU**  
Serving the local community

## The View From Here

Frustration, amusement, exasperation – these are often feelings we get at HRFU HQ when we have to review the many documents presented to us. It is very rare however that someone writes a sentence that makes us so angry that we have to report to OH to check our blood pressure and calm us down! However this recently occurred when we set out to review the salary systems being introduced around the country.

One of the arguments for the scheme (and this comes from Government not HFRS) is that it “removes the perverse incentive of firefighters being paid to attend incidents”. Let us look more closely at the argument being presented.

- “More incidents means more money and fewer incidents less money”
- “Reductions in pay are generally unwelcome, however beneficial the reduction in calls is to the public”
- “...join the fire service meant putting out fires”

So there you have it - RDS firefighters it seems are being presented as perverse money grabbing navel gazing individuals who would prefer their neighbour's home to burn down than proactively reducing fire in the community.

This perhaps should be considered against our wholtime colleagues, ambulance staff and the police. These people theoretically are paid to just sit around and wait for incidents! Another ridiculous hypothesis but built around the same parameters.

If ever this argument is presented to you, don't hit the individual but explain carefully that RDS fire fighters are perhaps nationally the most efficient and cost effective group of Local Authority employees. A group who do not reject every development introduced to them in this radically changing community safety machine, but have taken on board every proactive fire prevention scheme introduced, even when this means that there neighbours house may no longer burn down!

Ask them who has been attending fete's and local gatherings for the past thirty plus years to introduce fire safety to the local community – and ask them how much they were paid for these activities?

RDS firefighters have been at the forefront of presenting a fire safety message in their local communities long, long before it was a governmental mandate and our own service started publishing the benefits and crowing about their great successes.

Maybe salary payment will come, maybe it won't. But I will not accept false arguments which discredit and insults the quiet but strong arm of the Fire Service. If you want to present to us the benefits of the salary scheme please, consider your audience and take some time away from your desk to establish quite how unlike your perceptions of us we are!



## HFRS or will it be H&IOWFRS?

Status Quo, collaboration or merger these are the options to be presented to our Fire Authority on the 4th October. This move is not HFRS driven but involvement has been forced by Government edict. The Isle of Wight Authority will consider the same options. As John Bonney said at the meeting on 28th September, there are some very interesting decisions to be made. The final outcome of the deliberations will not be known until February 2007.



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

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



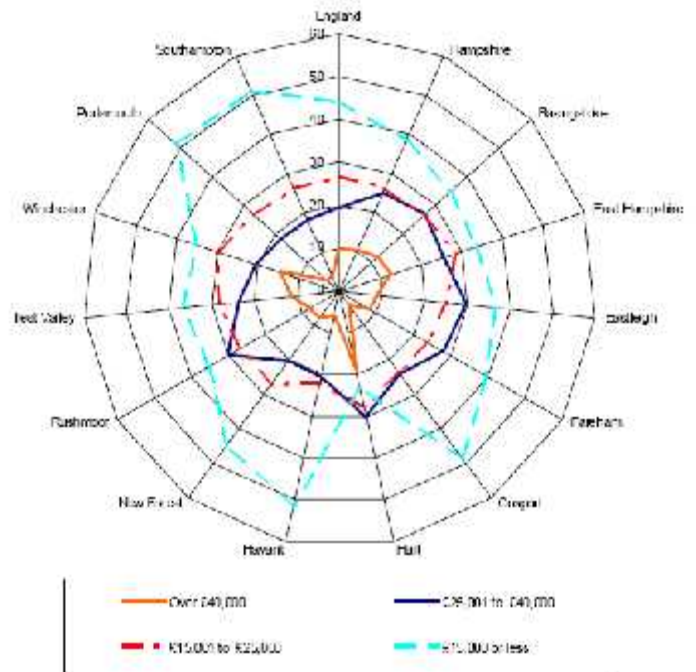
## The Long And Winding Road (to a HFSV in your rural area)

The figure on the left shows a spider graph from the Hampshire Government website which describes relative wealth of areas.

It shows the number of properties by value (as a percentage) in Hampshire.

It's a fairly generic graph however, look at this graph and then combine it with where Home Fire Safety visits are being undertaken. If you accept that areas where properties are more valuable pay a greater council tax it can be seen that there is an inverse relationship to the amount of council tax that you pay to the chances of you getting a Home Fire Safety visit.

HFRS have already released details about the rollout of HFSV's to Retained Stations and with much wringing of hands have informed us that it will take up to 2 years for all stations to start undertaking this initiative as the budget is not there to support it any quicker. In addition, those RDS stations that are undertaking HFSV's are artificially throttled to just 6 visits a week. That means that by 2010 (remember our IRMP that indicate that every house in Hampshire will have been visited by 2010) an RDS station that is undertaking HFSV's today will manage to visit just 1000 households.



Obviously those that have yet to start carrying out HFSV's will manage even less.

This is simply not good enough. We feel that every resident in Hampshire should have an opportunity to receive a visit from HFRS notwithstanding the identified areas of greatest impact. An organisation which can budget for new uniforms across its service, changing officers helmets and insignia, wage rises for senior officers as well as cost savings by reducing the training resources available to its front line staff - possibly all essential resource demands - should also have the ability to raise sufficient funds to provide an honest and fair service to every resident of Hampshire not just those served by Wholetime stations.

## HFRS IT Support

It is so easy to criticise but I would like mention the great service I received from IT Support. It was 22:00 on a Wednesday evening when I phoned through my 'issue'. The lady who helped was courteous, friendly and extremely helpful. RDS requirements may well mean that we require help 'out of hours' and this service adequately fulfills that requirement. I have also heard anecdotal evidence from others who have experienced a similar great service from IT support.



## Tip of the week

If like me you had one 'operational' fire kit and one spare a recent meeting highlighted the importance of ensuring that each one of your fire kits are equally used and serviced by Bristol. Using one preferred kit will mean that the other will not be inspected or waterproofed as is required.



Use each one of your kits equally.

## **Integrated Clothing Project - is bigger always better?**

The Integrated Clothing Project is a key part of the National procurement Strategy which aims at establishing “FiReBuy” as a procurement body owned by Fire and Rescue Authorities. The aim of this initiative seems clearly beneficial. Fire Services throughout the country will no longer have to individually bargain with suppliers to obtain their fire kit, instead the government will define the UK Firefighters PPE (amongst many, many other items including vehicles) and Fire Services will obtain their resources from one central purchasing resource. Imagine the buying power of a body which is looking to purchase PPE for every firefighter in the country. Firefighters will have a ‘national identity’ of PPE and uniform. Once again somebody sitting high up in government has come up with a brilliant idea in theory – but will it really work?

Firstly, because of the massive requirement no single body has been established as being able to supply the fire service. Consequently they are joining separate bidding parties with groups of suppliers. This however means that one supplier who may supply an excellent tunic (for example) may be in the same group as the supplier who offers an appalling helmet. No longer will our local fire service have the ability to cherry pick the best from each supplier, there will be no choice.



Smaller suppliers who may offer great products will be excluded and may not be able to offer their services to local fire services. This will stifle innovation and creativity.

Not all authorities have the same size budgets. Will the clothing have to be priced so the less wealthy counties can afford the items, thus meaning wealthier counties may not buy clothing of the quality they would otherwise have bought?

Is bigger always better? Many statistical studies have shown that initiatives like this can become too big and too cumbersome. The bigger it is the less ability it will have to change and develop. The ICP will be insulated from the ‘real market’ so there is a potential that that natural market forces which keep costs down will not be present so cost benefits will quickly disappear.

As an amusing observation, one of the drivers for the ICP is that Fire Fighters will have a national identity. How necessary is this really, but furthermore when you see a building on fire and people pouring water onto it, getting in and out of large red trucks – isn't it really quite obvious who the fire fighters are?

There may well be benefits to certain aspects being centrally purchased, the FireBuy procurement service helped reduce the cost of smoke alarms by a substantial amount as the centrally purchased the items – but items as important and regionally unique as clothing, vehicles etc. could easily become another governmental fiasco.



## Letter to Rep Bodies - from Susan Templeton

You may be aware that the Audit Commission has statutory powers to work with public sector organisations, both central and local, to identify fraud and overpayments from public funds.

The National Fraud Initiative is an IT data matching exercise co-ordinated by the Audit Commission under these statutory powers. It involves matching data – supplied by local authorities, police and fire services and other contributors such as the Contributions Agency, the Cabinet Office and the NHS responsible for public service pension schemes – to identify instances where housing benefit and pension frauds may be occurring against public funds.

Hampshire County Council are required to take part in this exercise and I need to make you aware of what it will involve. The data to be submitted to the Audit Commission will be the full payroll data as at 13 October 2006. The process is exempt from the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the Government is confident that the data matching techniques employed by the National Fraud Initiative conform to the Human Rights Act 1998.

The following short message regarding the exercise will be added to the September payslips so employees are aware that it will be taking place. It will say:

“Section 6 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 requires participation in the National Fraud Initiative data matching exercise. We will provide payroll data to the Audit Commission to be used for comparison to prevent & detect fraud.”

## JOIN THE RFU - THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME

As a retained firefighter, and an RFU member, you're entitled to some key benefits that you need to be aware of when considering your finances and how best to plan your financial future:

- Firefighters Final salary pension
- **£20,000 FREE Accident insurance**
- RFU Money access and much more

The RFU prides itself in understanding the issues that confront you in everyday life, and during your highly valued contribution as a retained firefighter.

To ensure that your needs and circumstances are catered for, RFU have developed these key benefits that you get free of charge within your annual membership fee. These member benefits have been developed as a result of feedback from our members via our recent survey:

- £20,000 Free Accident Insurance - provided by the RFU in addition to your death in service cover through the new compensation scheme.

- Access to independent financial advice regarding your FireFighters pension, and other pension arrangements to ensure your retirement is planned for and you and your family are properly safeguarded.

- Free access to RFU Money - To make your money work harder for you and ensure you have the leading deals available from the market as well as access to completely independent expertise and advice.



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