

SHOUT!

The magazine of Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union

Wednesday, 07 October 2009



The View From Here

Necessity, so the cliché tells us, is the mother of invention. And today, unlike the relatively comfortable preceding decade, there is an abundance of necessity. We are all aware of the current economic downturn and even though some predict that this is now at an end, others predict this is a temporary blip and the downturn will continue. The main problems of unregulated borrowing both on a personal and business level still exists and the massive government debt which reflects down to us as employees of an essentially Governmental agency in Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service will be a burden that we have to live with for many years to come.

Within HFRS we are already seeing drivers to offset the predicted financial pressures; with rationalisation of operations, the efficient and flexible crewing project and the reduction of riders on pumps (although we are advised that the main drivers for this are not economic it cannot be argued that this will save the service money).

Necessity, we predict will ensure constant pressure and reviewing of the services expenditure the efforts we are currently seeing are not one-offs but the start of a continual exercise to reduce costs. We recognize John Bonney's recent editorial advising that he cannot give a cast-iron guarantee that the jobs of individuals are completely safe, however a commitment has been given that everything will be done to avoid compulsory redundancies.

So what does this mean for the Retained Duty System? It is recognized that we are one of the most cost efficient services that any business could hope for and we hope that this recognition will offer a level of protection. However, our particular employment type will not be ignored and we will not be above review and potential rationalisation. I firmly believe that the likelihood of station closures specifically retained, will be very unlikely but the way that the retained will be expected to offer a service to both HFRS and their local community will undoubtedly change.

As a union the Hampshire Retained Firefighters Union will strive to ensure that your specific requirements are always dutifully and accurately reflected in all of the meetings that we attend. We will do everything that we can to ensure the quality of your employment and ensure that the specific requirements of being a Retained Fire Fighter are accurately identified, represented and recognised as an intrinsic fundamental component of HFRS. We will ensure that when decisions are made which we may not necessarily totally agree with, we will inform you of the decision-making process and hopefully give you an informed opinion of why it is so.

I do not predict a pessimistic view of future employment but I do predict a massively changing Retained Duty System along way from the service we deliver today. The best we can do at this stage is to advise you to expect the changes and look for the advantages which will undoubtedly be in them. As for the RFU, possibly now more than at any other time we require a good strong membership of the union and for this membership to feedback to us your views and opinions so that we may accurately reflect them. If you are a member of the RFU wherever possible please try to promote the benefits to others, you don't have to be evangelical but just point out the good that we do and how honest we are. If you are not a member of the RFU please seriously consider joining to ensure that your views are properly represented and the future RDS system is one you are happy serving in. **Remember we also welcome RDS staff who also are in a WDS contract as well and offer them full rights and privileges!**



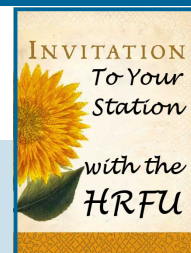
Invite Us To Your Station

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.



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



‘ Four Riders’ SMT Announcement

The four riders recommendation has recently been agreed by SMT and following up our extensive campaign and representations to the efficient and flexible crewing project which is the home of four riders we are pleased to see the reflections of our feedback were well considered. We can't claim outright success that Retained should always ride with as many crew as possible (up to six), but at the same time we need to recognize why four riders was introduced and the fact that the differentiation between Whole Time and Retained is levelling out.

The caveat to the decision is that before it is finally signed off two significant of factors will need to feed in to support it:

- Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service is awaiting the final publication of Technical Bulletin 1/97 which has been commissioned by the government to look into the resource requirement for BA wearing. This technical bulletin may in fact recommend that five is the minimum required number of crew attending an incident where BA needs to be worn. The RFU has a representative on this Technical Review Team and we will ask them for feedback. [due for completion in October / November 2009]
- In addition the regionalisation of Hampshire with other counties is producing a number of documents which identify exact resource requirements at (currently) over 96 identified incident types. On the completion of this project the number of incidents and their types need to be considered to identify the best possible divisive factor to make incident attendance efficient. For example if the majority of incidents we attend require a crew of five then it would not be efficient to make the HFRS riding factor four thus meaning three rather than two pumps need to attend most incidents.[due for completion in May 2010]

In addition the consideration of extraction rate will be considered which covers annual leave, temporary promotions training and sickness. This obviously is more of a WDS consideration.

In a nutshell what the recommendations now advise specifically for RDS is that if the station is attending a critical incident which may be identified as: RTC, Car Fire, Property Fire, Hazmat

Then the maximum resources may well be required and if all six riders are available and if it does not delay the turnout at the pump can ride.

However if the incident is noncritical then we reflect the whole time requirement and ride with just four.

We have asked that the Risk Log records that this decision may demoralise Retained Fire Crews. For example: If you have made a great deal of effort to ensure that you are one of six riders available for a one pump retained station and the shout comes in it will be incredibly frustrating to sit back and watch two empty seats leaving the station.

In addition the opportunity to gain experience at incidents will be reduced. With this decision given the green light you will now attend nearly a third less of incidents.

These two factors may well mean that some Retained Firefighters may no longer wish to give their services to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service and this will obviously have resource and financial implications to the service. We have been assured that these issues are recognized and that systems will be in place to monitor them.

And in the future?

This is not a decision which will last a lifetime indeed it will be reviewed in June 2010. We are as yet unsure whether this is a half step to Retained fully reflecting their Whole time colleagues and always riding with four or if the experiences gained over the next few years will support the above exemptions for RDS. However, we are happy with the process of consultation which was undertaken and feel that our arguments were not only recognised but acted upon. Come future decisions we look forward to representing your opinions.



The View From Devon & Somerset.

Our new mobilising policy that came into effect last Monday is based on personnel required at an incident and not the number of pumps (similar to HFRS).

As such, for a property fire, a minimum of 9 personnel are required within a 10 minute response.

As such, the only way of achieving that is to mobilise 3 pumps if the address is outside a 10 minute response and 2 if it isn't - however, a minimum crew of 5 is specified on the turnout sheet.

The minimum crew of 5 is now specified for the majority of incident in case of a 'proceed'

RFU Note: if the divisive factor is five then this must obviously be the ridership factor also - interesting!





£2,000 cash Incentive to Increase Fire Cover in Hartley Wintney

A SHORTAGE of volunteer firefighters is being tackled in a novel way by a parish council. Businesses in Hartley Wintney could receive up to £2,000 if they allow an employee to become a retained firefighter.

The parish council agreed on Monday it would try out the pilot scheme for businesses within four minutes of the village's fire station, in Brewery Lane. It will fund up to five retained firefighters, to a total cost of £10,000, for employers releasing staff between 8am and 6pm from Monday to Friday. The plan has the backing of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service. There are currently nine firefighters at the station out of a complement of 14, meaning it cannot operate up to 25 per cent of the week, with cover provided by other fire stations.

If the three-year trial is successful, the scheme could be rolled out across Hampshire.

Steve Hamm, assistant chief officer of Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service said: "We have tried various recruitment methods with limited success. We are therefore extremely pleased to have the support of the council through this innovative scheme and appreciate their proactive approach to solving the recruitment problem."

Councillor Graham Bartlett came up with the idea.

He said: "The idea behind this is to publicise the fire station and it's just another thing to add an incentive." The plan received broad support from councillors at the meeting.

However, Cllr Chris Cornwall objected, claiming that other parishes who receive help from the fire station should contribute towards the cost.

He said: "I do not think this is the right way to fund an emergency service."

All councillors voted in favour of the proposal, apart from Cllr Cornwall, who voted against. The scheme is due to be launched on September 5 at the fire station's open day.



Image courtesy of geograph.org.uk

RMS Update

A quick check on my mobile phone shows that the RMS system is currently responding to just over half of my texts with the other half disappearing somewhere that nobody is quite sure where!

But good news is on the horizon, the RMS system is soon to be set up in the way the developers originally intended and in a way that has been proved efficient and robust in many services throughout the country. After many, many months of tinkering it should start to become the system we were originally promised it would be - how exciting is that! At the end of October it 'should' be stable and trustworthy!

Records

Whilst we are discussing the RMS system, we have heard that some Station and Group managers are

starting to use the records to monitor availability either via the times you have booked your self available/unavailable or via DNR's. Please get in contact with us if this happens to you.

It is very clear that the RMS is currently an unstable and flaky system and as such any records harvested from it cannot be trusted nor used in any serious debate.

We acknowledge and welcome the use of the system to help us all manage work/life balance in the future but not until it has proven itself!



£1 m package for frontline operations in Essex

ECFRS has unveiled the first in a wave of plans to re-invest £1m in frontline services. The money has been earmarked for training and to improve service delivery. Some of the cash will be spent on recruiting and training new firefighters to follow the latest recruit squad of 12 who begin training at the end of October.

Seven new instructor posts will be created to focus primarily on breathing apparatus and road traffic collision training to enhance localised training for whole-time and retained crews attending fires and road accidents. And significant funding for retained firefighters was announced today which will provide the equivalent of an extra hours training a week.

Chief Fire Officer David Johnson said:

"I am particularly delighted that we have been able to work with the Retained Firefighters Union in a positive and constructive way to enhance training for retained firefighters and the equivalent of an extra hour a week that the RFU has negotiated can only be of benefit to the entire county, particularly in those areas that rely heavily on the dedication and commitment of these crews. This demonstrates what can be achieved through co-operation." **The full article can be read here: http://www.rfuonline.co.uk/main/essex_%A31million.htm**

Threats of RDS Station Closures - Warwickshire

Warwickshire Fire & Rescue Service proposes to close seven Retained Duty System (RDS) fire stations and remove two additional RDS appliances on separate stations. Retained Duty System (RDS) Fire Stations due for closure are Bedworth, Bidford, Brinklow, Fenny Compton, Kenilworth, Studley and Warwick. In addition crews based at Coleshill and Atherstone who also work the RDS will be removed.

Approximately 60 employees working the RDS would be made redundant under the plans. The proposals are included within the Service's aptly named, 'Service Improvement Plan'. <http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/Web/corporate/pages.nsf/Links/D1E446EF0A01396C8025762E00409F82>

The brigade mantra at present is, 'Our intention is to provide a fitter, stronger Fire and Rescue Service for Warwickshire' if only we could believe that were true?

Tony Morgan, RFU Vice-President and Warwickshire RDS Crew Manager said:

"The consultation process has already caused confusion, the very same documents which have informed this decision are presently unavailable, it beggars belief that on such an important issue vital information has been withheld or is not easily accessible by those asked to make comment. We would urge members of the public and the relevant district and parish councillors to request and read these documents, namely:

Rising to the Challenge
WFRS Business Case 2006/7
Morphew Report

We are alarmed at these proposals, for the most part, the impact on fire cover provided by our members, the RDS in general and the communities which they all proud to serve.

CLG Questionnaire

Many of you will also be aware of the Bain Report, the joint RFU/APU survey and Conference in December 2003 and the ODPM review of the recruitment and retention challenges facing the Retained Duty System in 2004, which resulted in the publication of a report in February 2005. Although in Hampshire we have experienced many changes, the CLG now want to ascertain what is actually happening.

Part of the work now being undertaken by the CLG involves carrying out another survey focusing specifically on issues relating to the Retained Duty System, which will take around 6 months to carry out.

The RFU support this questionnaire and ask that when you as individuals receive a copy of the questionnaire, please note its importance and we urge you to take the time to complete and return it.

This is a rare opportunity to 'tell it how it is' from your perspective, not forgetting that unless issues which you see as important are highlighted they will never be resolved, so there is much to be gained by having your say. At the time of going to print we are unsure how this questionnaire will be distributed whether electronically or paper.

