

## Meeting with the Minister

The RFU met with Fire Service Minister Parmjit Dhanda on the 9th July, as part of our regular meetings and we discussed the following topics contained in this issue of Tip Sheet.

## Equality and Diversity

A National strategy for Equality and Diversity in the FRS was launched recently and our meeting was an opportunity for the RFU to register our support at a face to face meeting with the Minister. We believe the challenge is to now raise awareness within the service in order to make it work. However a recent survey of current and ex-firefighters reveals a worrying aspect in terms of behaviour, specifically bullying and the lack of confidence to report it or of it being dealt with. Bullying has resulted in huge distress for those on the receiving end which all too often results in resignation. We have a collective responsibility to work towards a culture which matches public perception of the fire service. There is much work to be done.



## In Scope

With the final implementation of EC Regulation 561/2006 in April 2007, drivers of LGV's and PCV's who are also RDS face uncertainty over their continued employment in the service and there is no derogation or exemption from these rules. The RFU has been in discussion with CLG for some time as to how we might be able to achieve a relaxation for RDS, but also aware that this regulation also impacts on other groups such as voluntary coastguards, RNLI, Territorial army and Special constables included. We are also in contact with other parties including other fire services in Europe.

**What now?** We are now seeking your help! To find out the potential impact this could have on RDS personnel we need those effected to complete our survey, either online or via post by contacting RFU HQ. If we do nothing, it could mean either dismissal or have on-call time dramatically reduced to comply with the law. If we can demonstrate that this change will have a negative affect on a significant number of RDS personnel we hope to be able persuade the Government to find a workable solution.

Fire Service Minister, Parmjit Dhanda said:

*"I was very grateful to you for bringing to my attention the issue of in-scope driving. This clearly effects many emergency services, not only the fire and rescue service. You are undertaking your own survey of this issue, and will share your feedback with us, as we will from our own assessment. Once we have a better understanding of the scale of the issue, I intend to raise it at Ministerial level at the Department for Transport."*

Irrespective of RFU membership, please fill in the form and return it to our Head Office or go online and complete the survey on our website [http://www.rfuonline.co.uk/main/inscope\\_drivers\\_survey.htm](http://www.rfuonline.co.uk/main/inscope_drivers_survey.htm) We will not release names, we're only interested in numbers, we shall then use this information to lobby for a relaxation of the rules.

**Please fill it in!**

## Co responder

In early June we became aware of a problem regarding Co-Responder Schemes which arose out of uncertainty, misinformation (*call it what you will*) over 'clinical negligence indemnity insurance'. NHS Litigation Authority advised all Ambulance Trusts, certain NHS bodies, Trusts, Foundation Trusts and Primary Care Trusts, that they are unable to provide NHS indemnity insurance cover for non NHS bodies which included Fire and Rescue Services.

This resulted in a number of FRS suspending the use of Fire Co responders throughout the UK. We are well known for our longstanding support for those who co-respond and we put in a great deal of effort to lobby for these schemes to be reinstated. Eventually after having raised this with CLG a solution was found and we're pleased to say that the suspension was lifted. What is clear however, is that CLG and the NHS have to work together to iron out these difficulties in the future. Lives are being saved every day thanks to Co responders.

### ***Ill-Health review***

Members will be aware from previous Circulars that there have been problems with regard to pension provision for those who sustain an injury on duty. The RFU is fully engaged in working with CLG to reach a solution and this has culminated in a draft Circular being produced which satisfies most of our concerns. In addition we have contributed to an LGA best practice document covering redeployment and other issues. We await the release of both the Circular and the guidance but due to an ongoing legal case this is unlikely to be until January of next year.

Whilst progress has been made we continue to have concerns on the arrangements for those RDS who have joined the service post April 2006. These concerns centre around the provision for RDS who are permanently injured on duty and lose their primary employment because of it. Members need to be aware that whereas the FPS provided an injury pension based upon equivalent Wholetime earnings, rank, age and length of service, the NFPS provides for a pro-rata award based upon RDS earnings. This could have a huge impact upon financial security for those who suffer permanent injuries. We are currently doing some work on two fronts to be able to mitigate the effects and will provide more details as and when this has been completed.

### ***Ill-Health retirements***

For those members who have joined the NFPS there is a consolation in that should a member suffer from a health issue rather than an on-duty injury, which causes them to have to leave the service, they will at least be entitled to an ill-health pension, which wasn't the case with the FPS, we understand that take up of the new scheme is low, around 30%, perhaps now is the time to consider joining the scheme at least for this benefit.

### ***Japan***

In May our President Adrian Hughes attended the International Volunteer Fire Service Conference in Japan as the guest of the Japan Firefighters' Association.

A delegation from Japan visited the UK last year and were escorted by the RFU including our President on visits to London Fire Brigade and the USAR facility at the Fire Service College.

The conference was organised by the association in co-operation with the Fire and Disasters Management Agency of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, with the approval of CTIF President and was attended by many fire services from both the developed countries and the third world. The theme of the conference centred on problems that the volunteer fire service is facing, and also on how the fire service responds to terror attack and natural disasters.

The conference also included a tour of Kobe, Kyoto and Osaka and provided attendees with a good opportunity to have a look at Japan's fire service as well as its historical and cultural spots. A report of this visit will be included in the next edition of Tip Sheet.

### ***Alcohol and Drugs Policies***

We are aware that in some services there are problems surrounding drinking whilst on call, in some cases members claim they are unaware of the restrictions which apply. Firstly, it is the responsibility of the service to make all staff aware of any new policies and to be proactive in making sure that the message is getting to where it needs to be. Members who drink and then respond in vehicles and then drive appliances could face dire consequences if proved to be over the legal limit and/or breaching brigade policy.

### ***On station, on duty***

Members call in at the station for a number of reasons, booking on/off call, cleaning their kit, admin etc. are all examples. Our advice is, the moment you go on to the station, sign yourself in or ring control to let them know you are there. Why? If you are injured on station and arguments arise as to whether you were there or not, you have no proof of the time, so protect yourself by taking the time to sign the attendance book.

## **National Firefighter Selection Tests**

The National Firefighter Selection Tests have been available for use by the UK FRS since 2006 and are intended to deliver consistency across the UK FRS and across duty systems, which would provide for

- *fairness and transparency*
- *legal defensibility*
- *the ability to recruit a more diverse workforce*

Consultants have recommended that a new validation exercise is put in place, using a redesigned performance measure. A CFOA task and finish group is being set up to look into this issue.

At the recent **Practitioners Forum** meeting a paper submitted by CLG was discussed by forum members, concerns had been raised regarding the questionnaire and any adverse impact on RDS recruitment. Whilst the NFS test is designed to be used across the board, discussions took place over splitting the form into two parts and using the second part at a later stage if and when a member of the RDS applied to transfer to WDS.

A recommendation was tabled and Forum members were asked to give their views on the following proposal, which was accepted at the meeting.

- Dropping the National Firefighter Questionnaire (NFQ), subject to independent confirmation that doing so does not impair the overall integrity of the process.
- CLG commissioning work to minimise the areas of adverse impact in the NFA
- CLG commissioning a new validation study
- CLG and ODC working with CFOA to determine if there are other ways in which the process can be improved and look at the links between NFS and other parts of the recruitment process such as positive action and phase 1 development training programme.
- CLG, ODC and CFOA discussing ways of improving data collection.
- Whilst this work continues the reference in the National Framework that FRAs must use the NFS process shall not be activated as it was 'subject to validation'.

*A copy of the discussion paper can be found on the RFU website.*

## **Birthday Honours**

We are pleased to advise our members that our Previous National General Secretary Derek Chadbon was awarded an OBE in the birthday honours. We are delighted that Derek's contribution to the service for over 40 years has been recognised in this way.

*Adrian Hughes, president of the RFU, said: "Derek is a very worthy recipient of this honour and as an organisation we are thrilled and delighted he has been recognised in this way."*

*Current RFU General Secretary, John Barton said "This award is richly deserved by someone who for 42 years has dedicated their life to the fire service specifically trying to better the working conditions for personnel within the Retained Duty System. Derek didn't always receive the appreciation of the wider Retained establishment throughout the UK but it is clear that he had the long term interests of the Retained Service at heart."*



In July we announced the launch of RFU Plus our own benefits website, [www.rfuplus.co.uk](http://www.rfuplus.co.uk) For the last 6 months or so we have been working with a commercial partner to develop a website tailored to the needs of RFU members and their families.

We believe his website is unique to a Trades Union, designed to offer both choice and discounted products and services to RFU members. At the time of launch there are products ranging from Insurance, Independent Financial Advice, Phone and internet packages, Domestic Appliances, Toys, Gifts and Car related products including tyres and road side assistance. We expect to build on the range of products and services for the foreseeable future and encourage our members to visit the site to see what is on offer. Just log on, using the prefix and number on your membership card.

### *A few of the deals currently on offer*

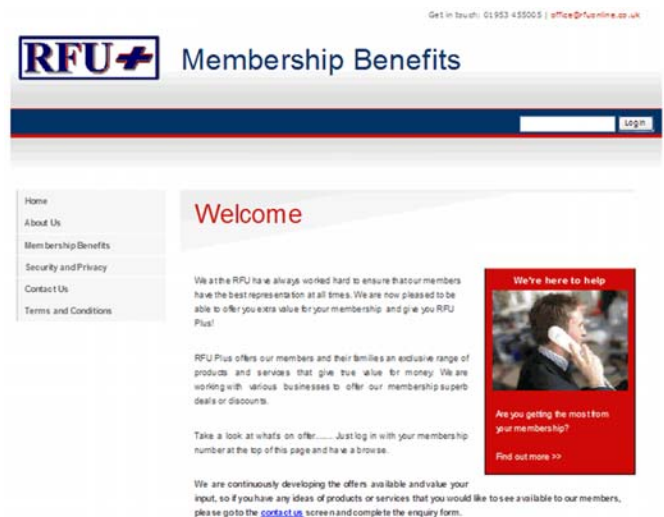
- ❖ Car breakdown cover - £36 premium for 12 months!
- ❖ Discount on Car tyres
- ❖ Discounted Electrical goods
- ❖ Mobile phone, Fixed line and Broadband packages to suit your family's needs

These offers can easily save you the cost of your RFU subscription.

All this at no extra cost!

**PLUS**

Don't forget you also receive **£20,000 FREE** Accidental Death Insurance.



### **Contact the RFU**

RFU  
Firefighter House  
Station Road  
Attleborough  
Norfolk  
NR17 2AS

**t:** 01953 455005  
**f:** 01953 454760  
**e:** [office@rfuonline.co.uk](mailto:office@rfuonline.co.uk)  
**www:** [www.rfuonline.co.uk](http://www.rfuonline.co.uk)

### *Devon and Somerset lead the way in addressing the issue of paid time for RFU reps*

To end this issue of Tip Sheet, we are very pleased to advise members that following discussions with Devon and Somerset we now have a part-time post. Mark Smith has been appointed as brigade Secretary. This post is unique in the UK FRS and we wonder why it has taken so long for the RFU to be granted facilities which are provided elsewhere to others!