

RFU National News

Newsletter for the Retained

Vol. 3 Issue 01



Introduction

I think that most retained personnel are now aware that there is a massive amount of change going on in the UK fire and rescue service. This newsletter is packed with information about many of these changes, and we urge you to read this, and any other information that comes your way.

We have been very critical of the failure of many fire service bodies to keep personnel in the picture in the past 18 months. The fire and rescue service has been driven by the dispute between the National Employers and the FBU, and the casualty of this is that many other issues have not been dealt with, and a significant number of personnel have not felt they are part of the process of change.

There is light on the horizon though, with the promise of new and more inclusive institutions to drive through the process of modernising the service for the benefit of our communities.

In the meantime, all of us must work at local and national level to ensure our views are heard.

The fire and rescue service is going to change-and rapidly-lets make sure it is for the better!



Derek Chadbon
National General Secretary

Lack of Communication causes unrest within the service

The November Pay Deal continues to cause much confusion with neither the NJC nor local brigade pay departments being able to answer the many queries Retained personnel are raising. It seems strange that the current NJC has implemented a pay deal supposedly worth an average of 13.74% but many of the details are missing. We have been inundated with queries ourselves over the new pay structure because of no information having been fed from the National Employers to the brigades and their respective employees.

Independent analysis of the pay deal shows the new structure produces changes in pay from **minus 10.4% to plus 17.3%!!**

Initially the new deal was even worse for Retained but due to an outcry by personnel and the RFU, the current NJC postponed until 1 July 2004 two major changes to pay in the hope of softening the blow, namely;

- the new "Disturbance" payment will continue to be paid for "Re-directions", but only until 30 June 2004, after which only the initial call will attract a "Disturbance" payment and any additional calls received before booking off will be paid at the hourly rate only
- the "Disturbance Fee" will no longer be paid when a call is received on a drill period after 30 June and payment of the hourly rate will continue from the beginning of the drill period until either the end of the call or the end of the drill period, whichever is longer.

The "Guaranteed" 7% Increase and Safeguarding

The NJC has said that retained personnel will *"receive a minimum increase of 7% for the same pattern and level of work activity"*.

So far, there has been no national guidance on how this protection will actually work, and therefore few brigades have issued any information (some two months after the pay deal). It seems contradictory when brigades are seeking additional staff to cope with the implications of the new pay structure at a time when brigades are supposed to be making savings!

We do not envy the problems that brigade payroll departments face in the coming months but we do however ask Retained personnel to be vigilant by ensuring that they are not underpaid due to the complexities of the new system.

Devon Implement Protection Arrangements

After discussions between the RFU and Devon, the brigade has implemented its own internal safeguarding arrangements, which will check each individuals pay, and will make an adjustment if they are worse off under the new arrangements. We suggest other brigades follow suit for the benefit of Retained personnel and their payroll departments.

Safeguarding Calculator

The RFU has put in place on its website a pay calculator that enables members to calculate any reduction in pay on a monthly basis, and there is a suggested memo to accompany this as a claim to your pay department.

Paper copies of this system can be obtained by telephoning RFU HQ if you do not have access to our website.

Meeting with National Employers

The RFU had a meeting with the national employers on 10 December 2003, and although we were not involved in the pay negotiations, they have asked us to submit our views, and this includes the need to implement a national pay protection arrangement for all retained personnel in every brigade.

The Staged Payment-when do we get the other 3.5%? The fact that only 3.5% of the 7% increase due from 7/11/03 has been agreed has not helped overcome the considerable confusion. The second half of the increase will not be sanctioned until the Audit Commission has reported on whether all of the pay deal conditions are being met (see Employers Circular 25/03 containing the Joint Secretaries Position Statement).

In the meantime, retained personnel are supposed to be being paid 3.5% extra from 7/11/03 and parity of the hourly rate. However, partly due to the usual time lag in retained payments, and partly due to all of the confusion surrounding the pay deal, some brigades are having great difficulty in implementing these new payments.

Worse still, very few Retained personnel can understand what they are actually being paid when they receive their pay advice slips. We believe brigades have an obligation to ensure personnel have much better information on what they are actually being paid, an itemised payslip as issued in Devon for example.

Unresolved Pay Query. At the time of writing we have asked, but received no answers to the question put to the National Employers, will the "Disturbance" fee be doubled on public

holidays?

Premium Overtime Pay

Wholetime personnel receive premium overtime rates after working 42 hours in a week. Does this now apply to Retained under parity say, for example, when you have completed 42 hours on a training course, and then undertake additional hours in fire calls or training? Yet another query the employers have so far failed to clarify.

Payment of the Hourly Rate

We have been told the new (wholetime) hourly rate will be paid after working 75 minutes, and will be subject to the payment of one full hour minimum, but the employers propose to change this to payment only for completed 15-minute periods. This will have catastrophic implications on Retained personnel and reduce earning considerably bringing into question the theoretical average pay rise of 13.74%. Does anyone on the current NJC understand the workings of the Retained system? On the evidence presented to us and serving personnel it seems not.

It remains to be seen if the employers pursue this with the FBU under the existing NJC arrangements, or wait until the new NJC arrangements are up and running, with RFU membership.

In the meantime the RFU are consulting our lawyers about the right of the Employers to pay personnel the parity of hourly rate- but not until 75 minutes has been worked.

Pay Review Team

The RFU is currently putting into place a Retained Pay Review Team which will produce various options for a new Retained Pay System which unlike the current deal will aim to;

- overcome the shortage of day cover on many stations
- deal with the 20% overall shortfall in retained numbers
- provide parity of pensions and other conditions of service

Availability

The new availability system of 120 hours per week for a full retaining fee is being ignored by many brigades, who are continuing with their previous measures of recording availability and response to calls. This makes a mockery of the whole process, how can one brigade pay an employee $\frac{3}{4}$ Retaining fee for providing 120 hours of fire cover compared to a neighbouring station who would pay their employee the full retainer?

RFU Pay Poll

We issued a one page questionnaire on the new pay structure back in November and although replies are still being received at HQ, we can inform you that at the time of writing the result is a staggering 98.2% are unhappy with the new pay structure. We will be forwarding our results to the Employers shortly.

The Future?

We expect the role and workload of Retained personnel to be affected by a number of changes that are on the horizon, including:

- Call management (reductions in AFA's) which is already in operation in Oxfordshire
- Integrated Risk Management Plans
- Integrated Personal Development System (extra training hours)
- A greater emphasis on Community Safety
- Opportunities for Retained to take on additional and wider roles, including co-responder schemes, promotion to management roles, instructing, etc.

The RFU has told the National Employers that we believe the November 2003 pay deal will have to be re-negotiated, as it does nothing to focus on the current and future needs of communities covered by Retained personnel.

Parity Inequalities

The November 2003 pay deal is the second stage of the pay arrangements that were backdated to November 2002, following the FBU's strike action. Part of this deal provided for two parity exercises:

- Parity for Control personnel was backdated to Stage 1 from November 2002
- Although part of the same deal, the Retained hourly rate parity was not backdated, and was implemented a year later from November 2003, we cannot understand why the NJC agreed to this.

This is not parity of treatment and therefore the RFU is consulting our legal advisers.

The Future (part 2)?

The National Employers have told us not to expect the failures in the recent retained pay deal to be put right under the old NJC. ACAS are currently involved in setting up the new NJC that was announced in the White Paper, which they say will be completed by 31st January 2004.

If they fail to get agreement on the new NJC, then the Government has said they will impose the change, with full RFU recognition. The RFU does not pretend that we will be able to overcome all of the problems of Retained pay and conditions immediately, but we will make sure that your views are at last heard, and your interests are looked after. Where legal action is shown to be the only option, then we will pursue it.

At the same time, the RFU has been pushing for action on many other issues, which are not within the remit of the NJC, such as recruitment and retention.

RFU Recognition

While we understand the delay in forming the new NJC is frustrating for our members we have been working with a number of pro-active brigades who want to recognise the RFU now and have therefore put forward and had agreed by their fire authorities to grant the RFU full recognition. These brigades currently are; Buckinghamshire, Mid & West Wales, North Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, with other brigades in the process being, Lancashire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Somerset and Hereford & Worcester. The rest of



Fire Service Minister, Phil Hope receiving the report containing the findings from the APU survey from Dr Pamela Donnelly and RFU's Derek Chadbon

the brigades are waiting for the RFU to take up our seat on the new NJC before progressing agreements. The above are in addition to our recognition agreement in over 25 brigades.

Retained Review Team

At a conference organised by the RFU and Anglia Polytechnic University on 15/12/03, Phil Hope, Minister at the ODPM announced the setting up of a stakeholder review team, including the RFU, to undertake a wide-ranging review of these Retained issues. The first meeting will be held this month, and the Team will report during the summer.

Retirement at 55

At the RFU conference, the Minister also announced a review of medical guidelines and the need for a compulsory retirement age as part of modernisation of pensions. This follows extensive RFU lobbying that has shown that arbitrary retirement on the stroke of midnight on the 55th birthday is nonsense, if it does not take account of fitness, need and willingness to serve. In the meantime, ODPM guidance has recently been issued to every fire authority reminding them of the existing (limited) flexibility to extend service beyond 55, until the above reviews have been carried out.

Retained Questionnaire

The RFU conference at Chelmsford on 15 December was attended by representatives from the majority of brigades who came to hear the outcome of a survey of the opinions of Retained personnel who were sent a questionnaire earlier in the year. This was initiated by the RFU to gauge the opinion (for the first time) of personnel at the "sharp end" who have been under-represented in the past.

The questionnaire was devised by Anglia Polytechnic University, and analysed by them in order to protect the impartiality of the exercise. The outcome will help to inform some of the work to be undertaken by the Retained Review Team. We are not yet ready to publish all of the details of this valuable research, but here are a few "snippets";

- The majority of Retained personnel joined and continued in order to serve their communities.
- Only 19% joined in response to advertising, and the recruitment process takes too long.
- The Service is heavily reliant on the self-employed.
- Over 84% of personnel are willing to undertake more training under IPDS.

- There was a high level of dissatisfaction and a feeling of being discriminated against due to the failure to provide a pension scheme.

Further information on the outcome of this survey will be issued in due course.

Change Management

We do not necessarily support all of the theories of management in the textbooks, but we do agree with every single one that picks out the essential importance of the need to manage change and especially the need to communicate with personnel

We do not think the current NJC have been successful in managing this process of change in relation to Retained pay.

Integrated Personal Development System (IPDS)

This change from rank to role continues to give cause for concern. Many Retained personnel have not yet been advised by their brigade how this affects them; others have received conflicting information-for example most brigades have indicated that Retained Officers in Charge are Watch Managers B, but others have made them Watch Managers A.



Again, many of the problems have been due to IPDS having been designed for wholetime, with Retained grafted on the end. The RFU has raised its concerns over IPDS implementation with the National Employers.

While we are on the subject of the lack of change management and "grafting" retained on the back of something designed for wholetime, there is much dismay about the implementation of IPDS. This is particularly the case where Retained Officers in Charge have been downgrade to Watch Manager, when their true role is that of a station manager. Another case, we are afraid of those negotiating the recent deal, not understanding the Retained.

This raises another issue, because the recent pay agreement provides for brigades to pay a three-quarter retaining fee to personnel undertaking less than 120 hours cover a week. Yet, many brigades in the past have paid Retained OIC's a full retainer, on the grounds that, regardless of operational hours of cover given, they are always on call, 168 hours a week, and are regularly contacted by their station personnel, brigade managers and the public, for their station manager duties.

We would be interested to know if any Retained OIC's previously on a full retainer have been reduced to a three-quarter level, because of the recent pay agreement.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The RFU feels the long-term prospects for Retained personnel in a modernised fire and rescue service are still good, but we have many reservations about the lack of consultation in the short-term. We have little faith in the current NJC to understand and resolve these issues.

We do feel the Government is aware of the problems and the potential for developing the future of the Retained Service, but unfortunately, they tell us that they cannot get involved in matters of pay and conditions of service.

In order to progress the interests of all retained personnel, and in view of the failures of the current NJC arrangements, we are pursuing a number of legal options with our advisers. We will keep you informed

RFU Subscriptions

The RFU subscriptions rates are due for review on 1st January, and these normally increase by the value of the pay increase from the previous November.

This year it has been particularly difficult to establish what the pay increase has been, as this has varied between individuals. Due to the RFU's newly acquired recognition nationally the demands on our organisation will be increased ten-fold requiring additional members to provide RFU representation on all relevant bodies. Legal fees are also increasing, as a result of some of the issues covered in this newsletter. Accordingly, we are increasing our membership fees from £7 to £7.50 per month. This will be reviewed by our annual conference in May.

If you have a particular important issue which you would like to put forward to be taken up at national level either contact the RFU HQ or your local committee member.