

RFU National News

Newsletter for the Retained

Vol. 3 Issue 04



Retirement Age

The RFU officials in Wiltshire have worked closely with Wiltshire Fire Service and have come to an agreement to extend the retirement age for Retained personnel in the brigade to 65 years.

Between the ages of 55 and 60, personnel will be required to pass annual brigade medicals. The frequency of these medicals will increase to every 6 months for personnel aged between 60 and 65 years. We applaud both the efforts of the RFU committee and Wiltshire Fire Service for their flexibility and recognition of those personnel who are willing and able to continue to serve their communities.

What the RFU in Wiltshire has achieved is being mirrored in agreements in other brigades.

Pay Systems

A number of Fire Services (Mid & West Wales, Staffordshire, Dorset and Devon) are undertaking a review of how personnel on the Retained duty system are currently paid (based on work activity), with a view to move the focus to availability.

We have seen the mould broken in how Retained are paid by South Wales Fire Service, who trialled the original system a couple of years ago which is now in the process of being extended to all Retained stations.

Many of these proposals are still in their infancy but we would welcome feedback from Retained personnel who have a view on this change.

FBU Strike Ballot - What does it mean?

The FBU announced a strike ballot at their recall conference last week.

The employers wanted to end 'stand-down time', when personnel are allowed to sleep in their beds, unless there were emergency calls.

They eventually gave way, under a threat of strike action, and allowed beds to stay, but with a proviso that personnel can 'stand-down' between midnight and 0700 unless required to undertake emergency calls or other duties appropriate to the IRMP, the individual's role, and these hours.

The FBU agreed to this arrangement but have now gone back on it, because it would also apply to bank and public holidays. However, double time and a day off in lieu would still be applicable.

The FBU strike threat, if a majority of their members agree, would mean a withdrawal from the 'June 2003 Pay Agreement'. Following on from this, they've really stamped their feet and voted to stop paying the Labour Party for influence.

For many Retained, withdrawing from the 'June 2003 Pay Agreement' would be a blessing in disguise, as the FBU signed up under that arrangement to reductions in the following Retained payments:

- *Reductions in the fees for turning out to incidents of between £0.40 and £2.89*
- *The ending of payment for redirections after June 2004*
- *The ending of payment for turnouts during drill nights after June 2004*
- *The hourly rate to be calculated in quarters of an hour (when on duty for more than 2 hours), instead of the previous minimum payment for one hour*
- *The loss of two double-pay bank holidays*

Many Retained are also experiencing a reduction in earnings due to the restriction of only being allowed to respond to calls for 120 hours a week and reductions in AFA's.

Retained personnel would have been better off without the FBU's 'help', as we would have received the Wholetime hourly rate (due to European legislation) and percentage pay increases under the old formula anyway.

Modernisation is at Stake

We have already seen unofficial action across the UK orchestrated by a minority of FBU members who are dead-set against the modernisation process. They would undoubtedly wish to travel back in time to early

2002 before the FBU Pay Campaign exposed hidden practices and a rigid fire service stuck in the past when the 70-year old standards of fire cover were designed to save buildings from the Luftwaffe, rather than protect the public.

FBU "No 2 Fire Deaths" Campaign

This is purely a mask for preserving or increasing Wholetime posts, rather than benefiting the public, as it is being portrayed. It certainly won't benefit the Retained. If we are really serious about cutting fire deaths the answer has to be domestic sprinklers.

Effect on the Public

We are reaching a crunch time. Does the fire and rescue service exist to serve the public, or is it a job creating scheme for FBU members?

A challenge to the Government

This resistance to change is at odds with the Government's White Paper and draft National Framework, and indicates some factions in the FBU still believe they can bully their views through, regardless of their lack of support.

The Government anticipated all of this when they drafted their new Fire and Rescue Service Bill, which is currently going through its final Parliamentary stages. The Act will give the Government reserve powers to impose the constitution of the NJC and issue guidance to negotiating bodies, which they must take account of.

We now see the Government having to use these powers, unsurprising as that might be. Allowing the current NJC (which the Government has stated has failed its members too often for too long) to formulate the make-up of a new more flexible and efficient body is a bit like asking the French Football manager to pick the England team which they will play against!

What can the RFU do?

Well, we have already achieved a great deal. 80% of the Bain report on the Retained service which aims to eradicate Retained's second-class status was through the RFU's submission. As was the Government's National Framework document, which aims to modernise the fire and rescue service in the interests of the public we serve, using Retained Personnel more than ever, including Community Safety and Co-Responder schemes. This has got to mean the end of domination of the Service for the past 60 years by the FBU, with fire authorities and management often unable to do anything without their permission.

What can you do to make a difference?

If you are a Retained member of the FBU- then consider what they have achieved for you- reductions in pay and worsening conditions of service.

If you wish to be apart of the modernisation process and have your station views heard and acted upon, then join the RFU. We have no conflicts of interest within our membership, ensuring our intention to obtain the best outcome for Retained personnel 100% of the time.