

RFU National News

Newsletter for the Retained

Vol. 3 Issue 08



New Dawn?

A new year brings new opportunities and a positive outlook for the vast majority of people and we believe the fire service is no different. However, over the past six months we have been observing how fire services have been progressing the modernisation agenda and listening to our members to gain a true impression on what lays ahead for personnel on the Retained Duty System (RDS).

The Integrated Personal Development System is on everyone's lips; to some it is seen as a development which will assist the belief that a firefighter is a firefighter irrespective of their duty system. Others see it as a needless change that will require endless paperwork without any real improvement at the sharp end and there are some personnel who simply accept IPDS without understanding the way in which it is intended to operate. Time will tell which view is correct, but the RFU will endeavour to work to adjust the system to the benefit of RDS personnel, as it is clear that, at present, its design has been with Wholtime personnel in mind and the Retained have been bolted on as an afterthought (nothing unusual there-then!)

At the time of writing, the implementation of the IPDS is still pending, awaiting job weighting guidance and details on the appeals process from the NJC.



Open carefully, fire service inside.

National Recognition for the RFU

With the recent recognition of the RFU by the National Employers, and as a way of ensuring we represent our membership, we have asked our local officials to provide HQ with feedback from members on several topics, including:

- new RDS pay trials/proposals-especially on levels of pay
- effects of changes in mobilising-especially reduction in calls through call management of AFAs
- morale in the light of the recent pay deals
- whether "safeguarding" under the June 2003 to maintain pay increases is still operating

The following are extracts from some of these responses:

Pay Trials

"There are no planned trials that I know about. However with the Chief and an ACO leaving shortly, I would not be surprised if some sort of trial was proposed. When I met with the new deputy last year he raised the issue."

"My brigade formed a working party, with the view to providing a fixed wage, like the South Wales project. So far they have said there is no extra money, and the bits I have heard means the system sounds like it is going to be very complicated. They are saving a lot of money on cuts to the Retained wages bill at the moment and we have been told this will be re-invested into the Retained. So we have started to think they will eventually realise they can not do the South Wales project without more money and get the extra money required by using savings they are making by reducing calls to 1 pump for AFA's."

"Our CFO has been dropping hints on an alternative pay system for over a year now, but is probably waiting for another brigade to take the plunge."

"I'm disappointed that the alternative salary system has been rejected. Most people on station, although wary, would like to see the system at least as a trial in our area."

"Everyone on our station is unhappy with the pay deal on the 15 minute issue, even the FBU rep!!!! Our brigade has not implemented any changes for AFA's yet, but the grapevine suggests that they are just around the corner, rumour is NO response to an AFA unless confirmed fire, and we have yet to see if this is true! It will be bad news for us if it is."

"The brigade is soon to hold a local referendum of retained firefighters on the 120 hour system. This is to be preceded by visits to all stations by the third officer who will explain the implications. From speaking to our Deputy, it is apparent that the brigade does not wish this system to be implemented, as doing so will create the need for dozens more RDS staff at a cost which will be met by tighter restrictions and lack of flexibility for all retained in comparison to the current arrangements. The referendum will used as a measure of opinion but will not necessarily affect the final outcome."

"The morale is bad regarding pay. My crew feels very uptight about splitting the hours worked up into increments as their full time employers dock their pay in whole hours."

"Failed miserably when it became clear that it was not able to be done on the cheap."

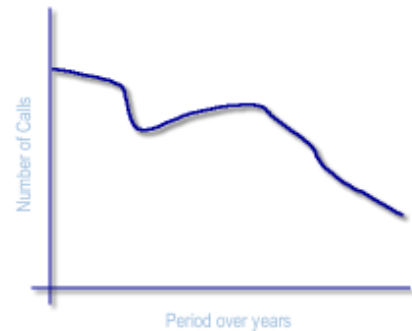
"There is to be a local review of the new Grey Book. The brigade will be looking for more flexibility in areas such as criteria for retaining fees. That is not just full and 75% but all the gradations from 0 to 100%. We are fully included in consultation/negotiation so watch this space."

"No new pay trials are planned at the moment in the brigade as far as we are aware."

Call levels

"Call management is being introduced as we speak, with reduced attendances to AFAs etc after a risk assessment."

"Retained on my station have been devastated, over the last 3 months, they have informed me they have lost about £300 each per month. One of them has asked to reduce his hours from 168, so he can get another job as the wage no longer supports him and they have told him he will have to leave, even when they are down to 7 men (2 of which have recently started, as the rest have left, they have never had a problem with crewing before)."



I have seen crewing drop to 11 personnel, with another 2 leaving and 2 more thinking of leaving. As day time calls are now very rare, no one wants to do day cover and we are starting to struggle. I have just moved from shift work to day work with my full time job (partly due to the fact it's not worth covering daylight hours), when the 2 others leave, the pump will be off the run most days during the day time."

"Every retained member of staff has seen a massive reduction in activity, and therefore, pay. The Brigade is also gradually handing much of the units paperwork over to the civilian clerk and wholetime. The stand alone retained stations are to see the end of retained officers in charge of stations."

These stations are to be linked to the nearest wholetime station and the station commander from there will be in charge of the retained station also. In my brigade we have four retained station officers, these ranks are to go but those personnel in post will stay on the same rate of pay but be reverted to Sub O. Our day crewed/retained station will lose its wholetime station commander and be linked to the nearest shift station. The wholetime Sub's will get a rise for being in charge of the station at times. The retained Sub, who will also be in charge at times, will not."

"Our station used to be crewed from 9 till 5 weekdays and 9 till 12 at weekends. This is changing to 9 to 9 seven days a week. AFAs have been drastically reduced with there now being a five minute delay for wardens to check premises on activation of alarm system before turn out of Brigade. Also, mobile wardens are sent to premises to check and reset the system if there is no sign of fire, without the Brigade ever turning out a pump. This is very dangerous in my opinion."

AFAs have been reduced to one pump in the day time but still two (so far) at night. With the station now being crewed 9 till 9. This has nearly halved the number of calls that the retained crews attend. In the summer, wholetime fire safety officers are sent out to spray detector heads with insect replant to reduce calls."

"Call reduction seems to be happening, without access to hard statistics I know from my own pay and that of those that I have spoken to that they are earning less, whether or not you can put this down solely to call reduction is unlikely but this must be having an impact."

"The number of Fire calls have defiantly fallen, but we are extending each call outs time by doing leaflet drops 10 properties either side of a property that we have been called to and also carrying out home safe checks, giving advice and even fitting(selling) smoke detectors. (I do feel sometimes a bit like a door to door sales person)."

"We have seen a reduction in calls. Although my brigade now sends 2 x pumps to a domestic smoke detector!"

"General reduction in calls for most stations, some down by as much as 50%, some only down by a few."

"Wholetime pumps have been moved from their home stations where there is a perceived lack of need or

where the local need can be provided from elsewhere. Obviously the retained crews are not happy as they are used for the third pump during these times; that is not a lot."

"From mid January - reduction in AFA attendance, to 1 pump for all incidents unless a sleeping risk - attendance is then 2 pumps. If fire confirmed at time of call, then full normal PDA implemented. This as standard is 2 pumps for all standard properties, 3 for higher risk properties. Specials have been removed from all PDA's although this will not affect Retained too much apart from odd calls with a Water Carrier or Incident Support unit. However, the Brigade Management has committed themselves to using Retained for more paid Community Fire Safety."

"AFA calls down in the brigade due to IRMP. Effect variable station by station. Calls on day crewed retained stations down due to new duty system and IRMP."

Morale

"Morale is good on some stations and poor on others but this is not just down to the pay deal. Fitness entry levels, treatment by Wholetime Officers, Pay forms not being processed etc are having an effect."

"Morale is at an all time low, people are leaving or talking about leaving. No one wants to do their contracted hours anymore; this is causing friction between everyone."

"Our crew and I believe all the retained crews in my brigade, morale is on the floor. I have heard also that many have or wish to leave the FBU. Many have left the Brigade all together. My unit has dropped from 17 to 12 in twelve months. A station up the road, the busiest retained unit in the brigade attending 3300 shouts in 1992 have been reduced to about 1200. The crew has dropped from 12 -168 hour personnel to 5 with other jobs. Their pump now has periods off the run which was unheard of before. Little has been done to recruit. I think the Brigade is trying to strengthen the case to make it fully wholetime.

I know this sounds pessimistic, but it is, unfortunately true. The retained in my brigade have and continue to be treated as second class. They will not stick together and are so easy pickings for the brigade."

"Morale - probably lower than ever. Manifested in cynicism rather than an unwillingness to do the job, however those little bits of free goodwill which amount to a considerable input into managing the retained service is dwindling and it is noticeable."

"What morale!!"

"The effect of the pay deal has been totally masked by the increase in the hourly rate. So no real moans apparent."

"Morale does not seem too bad from lower ranks, although some resentment from Junior Officers at being paid only a very small premium over a firefighter for being in charge of an appliance. Some pay is being redeemed by calls that last over an hour, and this is obviously at a higher rate than was previously being paid."

"Morale fair to middling, lot of complaints to brigade HQ over inept out source payroll department but this has been going on for years."

Pay Safeguarding

"There are no safeguards over pay!"

"We have seen no evidence of this and have not heard of any."

"Safeguarding pay increases has never taken place. The Brigade refused to monitor peoples pay and would not accept communications from personnel who asked for their pay to be checked or had worked it out that they were worse off. They would not accept the RFU pay matrixes either, although they could not come up with any alternative. Eventually, the retained crews stopped complaining (as they always do)."

"No safeguarding of pay in place at present although the brigade are to offer RDS personnel the opportunity to get involved in CFS work which they have stated will increase their earnings. This work may plug the gap



created by call reduction but unlike call-outs is organised by the relevant brigade department and involves stated times and hours of work which many retained will not be able to achieve. Most employers are sympathetic to their members of staff who leave work in response to an emergency call, I can't see this support lasting when a member of staff asks to leave the workplace to do a couple of hours smoke detector fitting."

"No!"

"There is no effective safeguarding of pay by brigade- will respond to individual queries but are not pro-active. It is too difficult for most people and too much bother to analyse each months pay."

"We have seen no evidence of any safeguarding of pay or even any interest in doing any research on the subject! Meeting with senior management on evening of 31st January to discuss this and other issues."

The RFU did predict some time ago that call levels would reduce due to call management, but this has been confused due to brigade's seeking to reduce their overall costs by utilising Retained less and Wholetime personnel more. It is questionable as to why some Wholetime personnel have this extra capacity to undertake additional activities. Could this be justification for a brigade to maintain their Wholetime establishment and is this the most cost effective way to provide a fire service? We will let you be the judge of that!

The Future

So how will this decline be halted?

It is clear to us that modernisation of the fire service was inevitable and we support the process of change. However we must remember that while policies may have changed, few of the people have. Restrictive practices and inflexibility still abound.

Morale is, in some areas, at its lowest point in recent memory, mainly due to the strike action, reduction in call levels, lower turnout fees and a process of change where the RDS personnel are either forgotten or added on as an afterthought.

It is becoming more apparent that alternative pay systems are seen by some RDS personnel as the way forward. A few brigades are already trialling or investigating systems which are similar to the one in South Wales. However, the South Wales system has had only limited success in providing more pumps on the run for longer periods of time, but at a huge increase in costs. There appear to be some brigades who believe that they can adopt a similar system within their current budget. Clearly, this simply will not succeed and an increase in Retained budgets must follow when this has been run on the cheap for years, although this still provides a cost-effective arrangement.

There is however light on the horizon; there are a few forward-thinking fire and rescue services that are leading the way in providing a modern fire service which has the RDS at the heart of its plans. These F&RS realise that flexible use of Retained personnel is the most efficient way of providing a first service to their communities.

RFU Recognition is the Key

It would be very easy for us to lay the blame at the door of other organisations who claim to represent RDS personnel, but that would be unproductive. Rather than indulge in mud slinging let us all look at the facts. Past representation has failed RDS personnel; the evidence is there for all to see. With this in mind it is time for non-RFU members to make a courageous decision. By joining the RFU, you will be strengthening a formidable organisation locally and nationally which brigades will have no option but to listen to and take notice of. We understand that making this change is more difficult for some than others; some personnel feel pressurised into keeping the status-quo and not rocking the boat. But it is clear that if matters vitally affecting RDS personnel are left up to others to move forward, then the system will continue in its decline.

Others have a proven track record of failings, it is time to use an alternative, it is time to join the RFU and make a difference. With our recognition by the National Employers, we now have the chance to represent your views.

More details on joining the RFU can be found either through your local committee or via Head Office.