

# RFU National News

## Newsletter for RDS Personnel

Vol. 3 Issue 09



## Recognition Update

### Station Closures

Due to the timescales of local IRMPs/Safety Plans the UK Fire Service is witnessing the proposed closure of a number of Retained Fire Stations in various brigades. It is interesting to note that at present these specific stations have no RFU members, being made up of either non-union or alternative union personnel.

We suggest you keep a close eye on the development of these proposed cuts specifically in relation to how hard the reductions are fought. The reason for this is to highlight the fact that the RFU has no conflicts of interests in that we represent only personnel with a RDS contract. This means that should a Retained station be proposed to close due to the gain of another duty system, the RFU would still provide 100% support to fight any reduction.

Non-RFU Retained stations need to think long and hard as to whether they are really better off without our backing. The proposed cuts are a wake-up call that arrives too late for some. To fall back on RFU support you need to be in the union sooner rather than later!

### Historic Meeting

Representatives of the RFU recently met with the National Employers in the first meeting to discuss reform of the industrial relations in the fire and rescue service. The employers have said they are committed to new national negotiating arrangements and RFU membership of the NJC. However, the national employers have an obligation to discuss reform with other unions, although the Government has taken powers under the new Fire Services Act to enforce change if this cannot be achieved voluntarily.

A number of matters were discussed, including:

- i) **The Protocol** for meetings between the RFU and the National Employers. This provides for regular meetings, consultation, information sharing and paid leave for RFU representatives.
- ii) **Review of the NJC constitution**, including trade union membership numbers. These discussions will be ongoing.
- iii) **Trade Union Leave** - The national employers supported facilities for RFU representatives to be given paid trade union leave for official national and local meetings. There was a discussion about the need for support for local recognition arrangements, including equal treatment with other unions and full access to all consultative committees and meetings. Further discussions are to be held on these matters with the RFU supplying information where this was not happening.
- iv) **IPDS** - We expressed concerns about the failure to implement IPDS for retained in many areas, based on a recent RFU survey, despite our belief that the development of RDS personnel has great potential for more flexible and rewarding opportunities. We noted the employers commitment to IPDS opportunities for RDS personnel and agreed to supply more information on the current implementation progress.
- v) **Rank to Role** - The employers made it clear that the implementation of rank to role, other than for pay assimilation purposes, should not be happening until the NJC issued guidance. The RFU said this was not the practice in reality and we are going to give further details to the employers.
- vi) **Retained pay** - We gave the employers details of the widespread dissatisfaction with the June 2003 pay agreement, including:

- *the reduction in the Turnout Fee*
- *the ending of the minimum payment (after 2 hours)*
- *an unrealistic and unrealised promise by the existing employees side to negotiate a substantial increase in the retaining fee*
- *a widespread downturn in call levels due to new call management levels*
- *failure to implement the income protection measures*
- *uncertainty over the continued payment of the disturbance fee for repeat calls and calls on drill nights*
- *the inability or unwillingness of many fire authorities to pay for community safety duties*
- *concerns over the tightening up of the Working Time Directive and restrictions on retained availability*
- *the lack of progress on opening up of employment opportunities and flexible working for RDS*

The employers recognised some of these issues, which are affecting the morale and commitment of RDS personnel. They referred to the need for a new pay agreement when the current one expires in 2007, but we said we would continue to push for earlier action.

The RFU is also pushing for early implementation of the report of the Retained Review Team, as a means of resolving many of these matters. It is a pity the union which currently has negotiating powers has resolved not to support this process.

### **The Way Forward**

These meetings between the RFU and the National Employers are already providing the opportunity at long last for the voice of the Retained to be heard. We are no longer content with being an add on to the conditions of service of other duty systems-look where that has got us!

Membership of the NJC by the RFU will provide a full opportunity for representation of the needs of RDS personnel.

*(PS. Many of the improvements in retained conditions in the past have been due to the RFU's views being "appropriated" by others. We expect the same thing to happen in respect of the issues we are now taking up with the national employers-watch this space!).*

### **Local Recognition**

Many fire and rescue services have granted the RFU full local recognition and collective bargaining rights to reflect the new recognition arrangements at national level. This enables the RFU and our members to play our full part in the necessary reform of the fire and rescue service.

### **Pension Update**

The new national pension scheme, which includes retirement pensions for RDS personnel looks likely to be delayed from April 2006 to July, because of the recent election.

Legislation to replace the compulsory retirement age for operational personnel of 55 with one based on fitness and need has also been delayed, and is likely to be implemented in October. *(Note: the Government has just published its consultation document on ending age discrimination by October next year).*

***THE RFU-THE ONLY ORGANISATION TO TRULY LOOK AFTER RETAINED INTERESTS***

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