

**Comments on 2<sup>nd</sup> Meeting IHRG papers**

**Paper IHRG (8)7 Table A - Number of Ill-health Retirements**

The above spreadsheet confirms the point previously put forward that IHRs have reduced significantly over the period for which figures have been provided.

It would be interesting to break these figures down further to establish if redeployment has had a significant influence. The level of ill health retirements were decreasing by a sizable proportion prior to the release of Pension Circular 11/2006 2006

Do these figures represent a reduction in the number of applications for ill-health retirement or merely those which are awarded?

**Paper IHRG (8)7 Table B reasons for leaving the service – retained firefighters**

Of the figures presented in this paper, the data relating to medical discharge from the service shows this has decreased year on year from 46 in 2003/4 through to just 13 in 2005/6 and is now the lowest of all the reasons listed or leaving. Even at its highest point it was the last but one reason for leaving the service.

However this low and reducing figure is open to interpretation, it should not be assumed that each individual who left the service during this period did so in receipt of an injury pension.

The discussion paper Annexe B is helpful when it mentions in Item 3

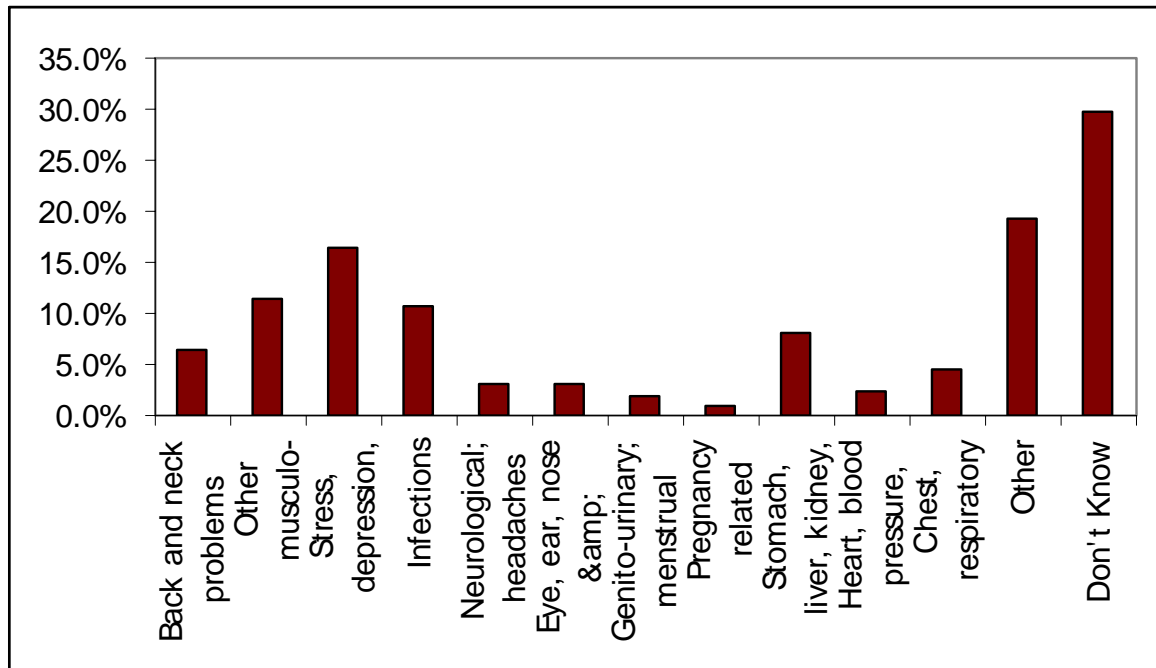
**Relationship with managing sickness absence and occupational health advice**

*'It should be recognised that there will always be a number each year of severe ill health cases or injuries and employees suffering from terminal illnesses and on that basis there will be a limit to how great a reduction in ill health retirements can be achieved, especially given fire-fighting is a physical task with significant injury risk. It is an important safety net for employees who need it and should not be seen as an inherent failure of the employment relationship, but the hallmark of a caring and responsible employer.'*

It should be understood that RDS personnel do not enjoy ill health pension benefits in the same way as their WDS colleagues and therefore "medical discharge" covers a number of factors.

Rather than simply assume that all leavers in this category did so with an injury pension we suggest that the reasons for leaving the service on a medical discharge

need to be investigated further to provide more detail. As has been suggested in **Annexe B Graph 1:**



### **Causes of Sickness absence**

The accurate reporting of reasons for sickness absence is arguably the most important tool in the reduction of retirement on the grounds of ill-health, prevention being better than cure.

The above graph would suggest that the cause of almost 50% of sickness absence is unknown or uncategorised.

Ill-health retirement of RDS is usually the result of an injury on duty and arguably unavoidable.

However the medical grounds for WDS are much wider and it could be suggested that the greatest reduction in WDS ill-health retirements may be achieved by better recording and management of sickness absence.

### **IHRG (08)8 DISCUSSION PAPERS – ISSUES SURROUNDING ALTERNATIVE EMPLOYMENT**

Both discussion papers were well put together and covered redeployment and reemployment in great detail. It is fair to say that there are a number of issues to be considered, Legal, HR, Pay protection, Occupational Health and without doubt a

huge challenge regarding any assumptions that reemployment in other organisations is viable or achievable.

Again, **Annexe B** provides an in depth analysis on a range of issues and I'd offer my support to the suggestions at the end of the document.

## Summary

In terms of direction of travel, we are content that the TOR adequately covers the issues and supports the RFU's view that revised guidance is urgently required.

We continue to have concerns regarding the impact that an injury on duty will have on the primary employment of members of the RDS.

We believe the challenges regarding ill-health and redeployment within the RDS are unique to the Fire Service. RDS were previously awarded a pension and whilst it was never designed as a replacement income, for many it was a much needed safety net.

Additionally we have concerns that failing to produce an acceptable outcome which maintains the protection previously provided by an injury pension will have a negative effect on recruitment and retention in the RDS and could even make this worse than it is.

Those who suffer injuries which prevent them from continuing in an operational role fall into two categories

- a) Those who are in office based, managerial or non manual occupations
- b) Those whose primary employment is in a physical, manual, motor vehicle, agricultural, building or allied trades

For those in **a)** whose continued primary employment is less likely to be compromised, the financial implications are lessened. Redeployment within the service in a CFS, Training or administrative role could be more suitable but should not result in a loss of RDS pay or worsening of conditions.

However, for those in **b)** who cannot continue in their primary employment due to it being of a physical nature which they can no longer perform, an injury pension has to be the only option and this will require amendments to the guidance.

All RDS personnel are entitled to be assured that should they receive an injury on duty they will adequately supported both financially and professionally.

The cost of a stand alone insurance policy to cover injuries on duty for what could be a lengthy period of time would no doubt be exorbitant if cover had to be provided for every RDS employee.

Potentially this cost could far outweigh any benefits gained by not awarding a pension when the circumstances were appropriate.

As has been pointed out in **Annexe A**, redeployment has to reflect the previous earnings and must recognise that where previously an RDS firefighter could have been available at a minutes notice to answer calls, the same expectation is now unrealistic. Especially if the primary employment has been unaffected by the injury

as the primary employer would be less likely or prepared to release due to the event not being of an emergency nature.

We would welcome a debate on redeployment and believe that the group would benefit from seeing examples of best practice, certainly with RDS in mind.

John Barton RFU

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