



# R B F & R S

## news release

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### **FIREFIGHTER SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT**

Operational crewing levels in Berkshire are more than adequate and do not put either firefighters or the public at risk, said Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Paul Southern.

A report produced for the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and released today, highlights the fact that Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service was noted for the high standard of its operational response by the Audit Commission. The report also comments on the fact that, in common with some other south-east fire and rescue services, RBFRS struggles to recruit retained (part-time) firefighters.

ACFO Southern commented: "We have had a problem for a number of years with recruiting retained firefighters in Berkshire and we have flagged this up at national level, during audits by the Audit Commission, and at local level with the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

"This is due primarily to the fact that retained firefighters were traditionally drawn from towns and villages where they both lived and worked. In many such areas now, the houses are extremely expensive and are owned by people who commute to work elsewhere and are not available as retained firefighters. To be a retained firefighter you have to live or work within five minutes of a fire station. The economic climate also means that employers, particularly small businesses, are less able to release their staff for firefighting duties.

"We are working hard to address this issue but have to accept that this situation is here to stay. However, we have recruited sufficient wholetime firefighters to ensure that our wholetime operational crewing is as we require and this is part of our response planning process.

"Another part of this process is ensuring that our crews are well equipped to deal with any situation and they are required to spend a great deal of their time whilst on duty training for operational response situations. In addition, they also receive regular refresher courses and training in the use of our specialist response vehicles and equipment. Their personal protective equipment is amongst the best available and we regularly review and update our operational equipment.

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“Staff are also required to report any safety concerns they have, no matter how insignificant, to ensure that our risk assessments are as rigorous as possible. We also work closely with the FBU in Berkshire so that they are involved in the decisions involving the safety of our firefighters.

“The health, safety and welfare of our firefighters is a vital part of our approach. We are proud of the standard of service we offer and this would not be possible without crews trained and equipped to the highest levels. The last time that Berkshire firefighters died at an incident was in 1977. Their sacrifice is not forgotten and our operational response is based upon the fact that, although firefighters will risk their own lives to save a life, we do not want them to take unnecessary risks.

“The FBU report is thoroughly researched and uses information from a range of sources but we think it is important that the people in Berkshire who rely on us are not misinformed. We would welcome any measures to improve safety and welfare for crews and it is our responsibility to continue to do our best to minimise the risks of what is, by definition, a very hazardous job at times.”

**ENDS.**