

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

Performance Review Committee

Item

10 October 2003

Scoping Review of Catering

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Note: Some confidential information contained in the original report has been removed from this version.

Contact: Divisional Officer - Personnel

## 1 Introduction

1.1 This report should be read in conjunction with the Report submitted to the HFRA Best Value Committee on 13 November 2002 – see Appendix A.

1.2 The HFRA Best Value Committee met on 11 December 2002 and resolved that “The catering review team, together with the Chairman of the Committee, reconsider the outcomes of the scoping review of catering, with the exception of those relating to emergency catering, with the aim of ensuring a greater degree of challenge, equality and fairness and further report to the Committee.”

1.3 At a meeting of the HFRA on 5 February 2003, members decided to amend this decision to include emergency catering provisions in the review of the original report.

1.4 The original working group reconvened for its first meeting on 17 February 2003. Further research and information gathering activities were undertaken and reviewed by the full project team during the period February to July 2003. This report is a summary of the project groups additional findings.

## 2 EMERGENCY CATERING

### 2.1 Challenge - Emergency Catering

Further research was undertaken into the emergency feeding arrangements for other emergency services.

### Coastguard

All Coastguards in this area are auxiliaries. Nothing is provided for them, they look after themselves.

## **RNLI**

Inshore boats, no provision

All weather boats, hot cans, tea & coffee, soup, some of the larger boats have a micro wave oven.

## **Police**

Utilise the HFRS emergency catering facilities at joint incidents, but have no other arrangements in place. For large protracted incidents e.g. murder, they have no system of feeding and would make local arrangements. They also have a quantity of hot boxes, which can deliver food at a required temperature for up to seven hours. On occasions they have used the Army to supply food.

## **Airport**

Provide no emergency catering facilities.

## **Other Brigades**

Additional information relating to the emergency feeding arrangements was also requested from Essex Fire and Rescue, Avon, Cheshire, Stafford and Kent.

These brigades were asked the following questions:

- “What catering facilities do you supply at emergency incidents, if any?”
- “Number of incidents for which the facilities were used?”
- “Average time at the incident?”
- “Cost of facilities per annum and per incident?”

Kent advised that they provide no on-site catering due to hygiene and Health and Safety implications. They have no alternative arrangements with another supplier, but ensure that relief crews are in attendance so that the maximum working period is 4 hours.

Avon and Somerset Police feed Avon Fire Brigade for free. They supplied 4,687 free meals over 55 incidents. The brigade saved by not making subsistence payments.

The other brigades did not reply.

## 2.2 **Compare**

The project group felt that it was appropriate to obtain up-to-date figures of the cost of the existing emergency catering facilities. These figures are detailed in the final report. During the period 2002/03 there were 57 call outs providing a total of 2,600 meals.

**The project group felt that the cost of depreciation of vehicles should be excluded from these figures as the vehicles would be used for other purposes if they were not utilised for emergency catering.**

## 2.3 **Alternative Suppliers**

Several suppliers were contacted and asked if they would be willing to provide emergency catering meals to staff. The majority of companies approached were not willing to provide such facilities. Responses from the remaining organisations are given below:

### 2.3.1 **WRVS**

They are unable to supply emergency catering as Hampshire County Council have awarded meals on wheels to a commercial contractor and they have no back-up staff or facilities.

### 2.3.2 **Eurest**

Eurest ( formerly Sutcliffe's) felt that they would be able to provide meals as requested by fire officers. They felt that they had the appropriate resources in place and have a bank of relief staff that can be called in to support the contract at short notice. They have recently introduced a number of vehicles capable of supplying Re-Energised meals for operational feeding. It is a mobile re-generation and delivery system for frozen ready meals, which would ensure that they provided a hot, nutritious meal. Alternatively, they can offer a "packed lunch" alternative.

A similar quotation was sought from Selecta, but they have not provided any details.

### 2.3.3 **Winchester Canteen Van (CaV)**

A return to the old Winchester CaV system arrangements, or something very similar, would be the preferred option of the Fire Brigades Union.

This would mean reverting back to crewing arrangements using on-duty or retained firefighters. Costings for this option were provided by the FBU previously.

### 3 HEADQUARTERS CATERING

#### 3.1 Challenge- Headquarters Catering

External caterers currently provide catering facilities at Service Headquarters in Eastleigh on a 5-year contractual basis. The current catering contract is with Pabulum and was renewed early in 2002. The project group requested a full breakdown of the process undertaken before this contract was awarded and received a full written and verbal explanation from the Financial and Office Services Manager.

County Supplies maintain a list of catering companies, all were invited to tender for the HQ Catering contract, but only four companies actually submitted a tender.

Criteria for awarding the contract:

- Tenders submitted on time and in the approved manner
- Compliance with contract specifications
- Value for money
- Financial viability of the Company
- Interview

The project group were satisfied that the appropriate procedure had been followed in awarding this contract.

The project team felt that it was appropriate to look at an alternative option for providing meals at Service Headquarters and reviewed some of the alternative options including:

- Provision of re-energised meals by Eurest. A quotation was provided by Eurest and considered by the project group.
- Revisit the previous options under consideration.

**Note: If HFRS withdraw from the contract with Pabulum before its completion we would be liable to penalties.**

With reference to the previous section; as the Service has only recently entered into a five-year contract with Pabulum to provide an HQ restaurant service, any changes would need to take account of costs involved in being released from this obligation.

The Service is obliged under existing agreed conditions of service either to provide free meals or a subsistence allowance to staff under certain circumstances. However at present a subsidy is enjoyed by all staff using these facilities. The pricing policy was discussed at length as it was established that HFRS has full discretion over the pricing structure.

## **4 WATCH CATERING**

### **4.1 Challenge – Watch Catering**

The current provisions for watch/station catering are as follows:

All 44 watches on each of the wholetime stations (not day-crewed stations) have a mess club where a designated person is nominated as the ‘caterer’ for that watch. The caterer provides meals for all the personnel who opt to join the mess club. From our research we have established that on average 65.7% of Watch Personnel are members of the mess club. The lowest membership is 50% and the highest is 88.4%. The cost of these meals are paid for entirely by the members of the mess club and priced by the watch caterer who also plans the menu for each tour of duty and purchases the food required.

The cost to the Authority for this service comes from providing a cook for each station concerned from Monday to Friday, daytime only, and paying the watch caterer an allowance of 3 hours overtime per tour of duty. The Service also incurs sundry costs such as provision of kitchens, equipment and upkeep costs, plus provision of firefighting personnel to cover when cooks are absent.

### **4.2 Health and Safety Considerations**

The project group received a presentation from the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Manager.

In 1998 HFRS produced the Catering Guide for use on wholetime fire stations where cooks are employed. This was produced in consultation with the local authorities environmental health officers. At the time it was sufficient and recognised as best practice. The Regulations have subsequently been updated and we have fallen behind. Unlike previous requirements the Regulations placed increased emphasis on controlling risks and on the control of practices and procedures. Since HFRS employ cooks to prepare food we are categorised as a “catering business”.

Legislative requirements include the following:

- Identify all the steps that are critical to food safety and ensure adequate safety controls are in place, maintained and reviewed. This would involve examining the process from the initial purchase of food, transportation, storage, preparation and service.
- Food hazards should be identified at every step and controls implemented to eliminate the hazards. This would involve installing controls to check for the presence of physical and chemical hazard at the time of purchase and strict temperature controls throughout the entire process.
- Records of temperatures for food storage should be recorded.
- Food preparation – training would need to be provided for all staff undertaking such duties and documented systems implemented to ensure that cleaning schedules are implemented for work surfaces, etc.

Full details of the requirements may be found in Appendix B

#### 4.2.1 **Current Arrangements**

The current arrangements are *non compliant* with the regulations and in the worst case scenario HFRS are at risk of prosecution. Part-time cooks are the only staff that have received any food safety training. The current arrangements can not be permitted to continue. An environmental health officer recently visited Rushmoor Fire Station and has confirmed our non-compliance.

#### 4.2.2 **How could HFRS achieve compliance?**

Employees preparing food for themselves would not be covered by these regulations.

Any member of staff employed by HFRS who is preparing food for others during normal working hours (including wholetime firefighters) would be subject to the regulations.

Maintaining current arrangements is not an option. Two options were discussed in response to this question:

- Station cooks assume responsibility for the purchase of food, preparation and cleaning of kitchen facilities. These kitchen facilities would not then be available to station personnel outside the cooks working hours. The implication being that, based on current working arrangements, the kitchen facilities

would not be available to station personnel during the evenings or at weekends. Alternative arrangements would need to be considered. One option could include the extension of hours for cooks to cover these periods, although there is an additional cost implication. The provision of separate facilities e.g. fridge, microwave for the reheating of own provisions was another aspect that was discussed.

- In the event of an outbreak of food poisoning HFRS would need a defence of “due diligence”. This would entail providing training to all staff handling food including firefighters; documented cleaning schedules and the adoption of a generic Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) policy.

#### 4.2 **Alternative Facilities**

The Eurest Re-Energise facilities were also discussed as an alternative. The average cost of a meal would range from £2.50 - £4.00 depending on the meal option selected.

Using existing cooks to prepare meals for more than one station was another option considered, but the Occupational Health & Safety Manager advised that the storage and transportation of food at the correct temperatures would need to be considered.

#### 4.4 **Spoilt Meal Allowances**

The Spoilt Meal Allowance is a Grey Book payment made when staff are called out during a designated meal break and the meal is then inedible.

During 2002/3 the Service paid a total of £2,889.89 in respect of spoilt meal claims. However, it did raise an anomaly on the amounts claimed by two comparable day-crewed stations. This matter has been referred to the Divisional Officer (Operations) to investigate further.

#### 4.5 **Consult - Watch Catering**

The project remit included looking at the options from an equality and fairness perspective and it is clear that based on current arrangements some members of station enjoy a highly subsidised facility, as food is prepared at zero cost to the individual.

Before reaching any conclusions the project group felt that it was important to ascertain how much station personnel would be willing to pay for a meal. A series of options were presented on the basis of nil cost to HFRA. The project group requested that Station Commanders conduct a quick survey of each watch on these options. 44 watches were approached for their views. A reply was received from 31 watches of whom 6 watches refused to selected an option, the remainder of watches did not reply.

\* The options available were:

*Option A*- continuation of the Station Cook/Mess caterer arrangements.

18 watches, 72% of the vote, selected this option.

NB: This option was included prior to receiving the information relating to Food Hygiene considerations.

*Option B* – Replace cooks on stations by contracting with an external provider to deliver pre-prepared chilled meals to the station. All costs covered by the individual.

No votes were cast for this option.

*Option C* – Provide neither station cooks or any other arrangements. Individual watch members would be free to use any kitchen facilities e.g. fridge and microwave to store and then prepare their own meal during the meal break period.

7 watches, 28% of the vote, selected this option.

The request for this information prompted much debate about the short time scales involved and various acrimonious comments were received in relation to potentially withdrawing the current arrangements. However, the results did highlight that the Re-Energise option (B) was not selected by any watch.

\* It should be noted that the options chosen for consideration by all watches were selected by the project team prior to receipt of the details of the Health and Safety Food Safety regulations. Once the project group had received this information it became apparent that the continuation of current arrangements would not fulfill the requirements relating to the Health and Safety regulations. Consequently, although option A was the most popular option, selected by the majority of watches, the project group felt it must look at the wider implications of the Health and Safety regulations.

## 5.1 **Emergency Catering**

There is overwhelming evidence for the need to provide some form of refreshments/ feeding at operational incidents.

Compared with other brigades, Hampshire enjoys a high level of emergency catering provision.

The general consensus is that the service and food provided by the Emergency Catering Unit (ECU) is good.

The cost of providing the ECU is high when compared with other brigades. However, this has to be viewed in the context of the reliability of the comparable information provided by other brigades and the cost of supporting the old, or alternative, arrangements.

## 5.2 **HQ Catering**

The general consensus is that the service and food provided by the Pabulum contractors is satisfactory.

The review identified that replacing free meals (where there was an entitlement) with a subsistence allowance would not show any savings.

The comparisons made with other employers proved on the whole inconclusive due to the wide variations in the levels of service and subsidy provided.

Given that a 5-year contract was signed with Pabulum at the beginning of 2002 the review team felt that the cost of getting out of this contract was significant.

However, there is evidence that some of the free meal provisions made for staff visiting or working at HQ is something that would benefit from further scrutiny.

A subsidy on cash sales was identified. HFRS have discretion as to whether or not to apply this subsidy without materially affecting the terms of the contact with Pabulum.

## 5.3 **Watch Catering**

In reviewing the case for the provision of catering facilities on wholetime shift fire stations the review team considered:

The current arrangements are non-compliant with current food safety legislation.

Although the current system is popular with the staff using it and is seen by many as a traditional and valuable aspect of station life, the current arrangements using watch caterers to purchase/prepare the food cannot continue. The food hygiene regulations imposes a significant training burden if firefighters are to continue to be involved in the preparation of communal meals.

The soon to be introduced Integrated Personal Development System is based on the Firefighter Role Map. This role map identifies the National Occupational Standards for a firefighter and set out the range of activities required in the role. The role map does not identify any standards for kitchen duties, consequently such organised duties could be interpreted as being outside the firefighter's role.

The current provision of cooks only during the daytime Monday to Friday means that there are many occasions when qualified, highly trained firefighters are spending valuable time preparing meals for colleagues and further highlights inequalities in the present arrangements. If station cooks are required on wholtime stations then the provision of meals should be available Monday to Sunday, day and night.

The cooks and kitchens are provided by the Service free-of-charge for the use by station based staff. This amounts to a level of subsidy not enjoyed by other staff, although HQ based staff are able to purchase subsidised meals in the HQ staff restaurant.

The Re-Energised meal option was not considered to be a viable option.

Currently, a night watch sits down to a cooked breakfast before going off duty at 0900 hrs. The majority of the team found this difficult to justify. It certainly could not be justified on the previously stated grounds of having to sustain crews due to them undertaking heavy manual work.

Alterations to the current system could only be achieved by varying the amount of employer/employee's contribution, both in time and money, made to providing station catering facilities.

The status quo is not an option.

## 7 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 7.1 Emergency catering

**Summary** - The current provision, although relatively expensive, is well thought of and more than satisfies the Service's statutory and moral obligations for incident feeding. Other than to continue with the current arrangements, the only other viable option, as suggested by the Fire Brigades Union, is to return to the old arrangements of using operational crews to provide the feeding at incidents.

**Recommendation** - That the current arrangements be allowed to continue but will need to be reviewed before any further investment is made in replacement vehicles.

## 7.2 **HQ Catering**

**Summary** - The current contract with Pabulum still has over 4 years to run. A contract early termination fee would be payable

Closing the restaurant and paying out allowances, where staff are entitled to a free meal, would show an increase in cost. A discretionary subsidy on cash sales was identified.

**Recommendation** - The current arrangements continue. Conduct a review of who is entitled to free meals and why. The subsidy on cash sales is removed.

## 7.3 **Watch based catering**

**Summary** - There is a long tradition to the current system and it is greatly valued by station based staff. However it is thought that using highly trained firefighters for shopping and cooking is not the best use of their time. The situation is further complicated by our non-compliance with food hygiene regulations that would add a training requirement to any one preparing food for others. The majority support a proposal to remove the watch caterer overtime system and to remove station cooks from the establishment. This view is not supported by UNISON or the FBU.

**Recommendations** - The removal of the post of station cook and watch caterer's allowances. Cooking of meals by watch members for other watch members would not be allowed. Watch members would instead be allowed to bring in either their own sandwiches or a simple prepared meal that could be reheated in microwave, this would be within the normal accepted meal breaks. A review of kitchen facilities on wholtime fire stations be implemented.

## 8 **European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998**

8.1 The proposals within this report are compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 and considered in the light of the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000.

### **Recommendations**

That it be a RECOMMENDATION to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority that:

1 The current Emergency Catering arrangements be continued.

- 2 A Review of arrangements for emergency catering prior to any future investment for the replacement of vehicles be implemented.
- 3 The Service Headquarters Catering Contract continues until the end of the contract.
- 4 The Headquarters subsidy of be removed.
- 5 An additional review of free meal entitlement be undertaken and actions taken to ensure that “free meals” are only available to those with entitlement.
- 6 Fire Station Cooks on Wholetime fire stations are removed from the Service Establishment.
- 7 The Watch Caterers allowance be removed.
- 8 A Review of kitchen facilities on Wholetime fire stations be implemented.

**Section 100D – Local Government Act 1972 – background papers**

The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report.

None

NB The list excludes:

- 1 Published works
- 2 Documents that disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act

Agreed report for the HFRS catering best value review team, 13.11.2002.

**INDEX**

<b>Section</b>	
	<b>INDEX</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>BACKGROUND</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>EMERGENCY CATERING</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>HEADQUARTERS CATERING</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>WATCH CATERING</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The report begins with a background section which provides the reader with a brief history of the project, the terms of reference, the make up of the team and the various roles and responsibilities.

The main body of the report is split into three parts covering Service HQ catering, station/watch catering and emergency catering. Each part is addressed using the BV format of the 4Cs – Challenge, Consult, Compare & Compete.

Finally the report arrives at the main conclusions, makes recommendations and provides an executive summary.

**2. BACKGROUND**

The best value review of catering in HFRS was allocated to DO (Personnel) to manage on 18.6.2001.

The terms of reference were to review:

- Service HQ catering
- Station/ Watch catering
- Emergency catering

A Review team has been appointed with the following references:

- DO Crisford, project manager and reviewing emergency catering
- Lorraine Hearnden, project co-ordinator and reviewing HQ catering
- John McClelland reviewing station / watch catering

The review team has been able to draw on assistance from:

- Jason Treasure from HCC Audit Services
- DCFO House HRFS
- SDO Webb from HFRS Quality Unit

Valuable input on behalf of the HFRA was provided by:

- Councillor Barron
- Councillor Russell

Significant and very useful contributions on behalf of their respective Trades Unions were made by:

- Peter Bates of the FBU
- Sue Brummit of Unison

An initial project plan was drawn up and circulated to all parties on 5.7.2001  
Subsequent information and advice received from HMFSI has resulted in the review being re-graded from a best value review to a scoping study and a revised project plan was drafted and circulated.

The full Best Value (BV) team met on 12.11.2001. This meeting received the teams first attempt to marshal the gathered information into the BV format of the 4Cs – Challenge, Consult, Compare & Compete.

On 4.12.2001 a Progress Statement was submitted to SDO Webb for inclusion into the Service Best value Plan for 2002.

The full BV catering team held further meetings on 10.12.2001, 25.3.2002 and 16.9.20002.

### **3. EMERGENCY CATERING**

#### **3.1 Challenge - Emergency Catering**

In preparing this report the review team asked the following questions:

##### **3.1.1 Do we need to provide emergency feeding at incidents?**

The available evidence suggested:

**Yes:** Regulation 25 of the Workplace Health Safety & Welfare Regs.

**Yes:** Grey Book section V1 para 5(2) ‘A member may be provided while on duty at a fire or other occurrence with such meals or refreshments as are necessary in the interests of efficiency’

**Yes:** All 40 brigades who replied to a Somerset Fire Brigade Survey said they provide some form of emergency feeding at incidents

**Yes:** Page 1 para 1.2 of the ‘Confidential audit report HFRS emergency catering’ refers to a DCOL stating that under H&S regulations ‘had to provide food and water to all firefighters whilst on the fire ground’

**Yes:** Page 3 of FBU in Hampshire review of fire service catering ‘The provision of some form of catering arrangements at these sorts of incidents is invaluable to maintain the well being, energy levels and morale of the crews attending’

**Yes:** DCOL 8/1979, para 10(c) ‘That bodily fluids are suitably replenished on completion of the task’

**Yes:** Evidence from the International Fire Service Training Association, ‘A fire fighter who receives adequate rest, nourishment and medical attention before reaching the point of no return will be able to resume emergency service operations and make effective decisions’ and other similar quotes.

**Yes:** Evidence from FBU in Hampshire ‘The management of physiological stress August 1997, ‘The logistics of providing essential refreshments to an incident immediately should not be beyond the means of most brigades, but it is an area that, due to local circumstances, may need more detailed consideration’ see also page 6 ‘adequate and early provision of suitable refreshments’.

**Yes:** Evidence from Dennis Smith Ph.D. in Fire Chief August 2001 ‘To lessen the cardiovascular strain experienced by fire fighters and decrease the incidents of line of duty heart attack it is recommended that fire fighters be physically fit, that work times are limited, and that proper on scene rehabilitation is provided to rehydrate fire fighters and combat heat related problems.

### **3.1.2 Does the way we do it provide ‘Best Value’?**

The available evidence suggested:

**Yes:** Para 2.2 of ‘Confidential audit report HFRS emergency catering’, ‘the service is delivered in an economic and efficient manner etc.’

**Yes:** Evidence provided by HFRS for Derbyshire survey states ‘Emergency catering facility is very well received’

**Yes:** DCFO House's report on emergency catering, 'The early attendance of a dedicated response can provide liquid refreshment immediately and then sustain rehydration and feeding refreshments over long periods'

**Yes:** Although on the face of it the cost of providing the Emergency Catering Unit (ECU) appears comparatively high, it should be noted that the largest proportion of the cost is accounted for by staff costs. In DCFO' House's report the point is made that 'When the team was established the costing of the payments for being on call, response and hourly payments was contained within the existing retained budget on the basis that we were never at our establishment budget level due to vacancies across the county in any one year'. Therefore it was not seen as a budget increase, merely a fuller utilization of a budget that already existed.

**Yes:** Any costs identified in providing the ECU have to be considered against the costs of providing alternative arrangements. These include payments to the Salvation Army or WRVS, locally purchased food, the cost of the old Winchester Canteen Van (CaV) system in turn out fees and hourly payments, and the costs of earlier and more frequent relief crews if adequate feeding were not provided.

**Yes:** DCFO House's report 'When you rehabilitate personnel at incidents, in the correct manner, you lessen the need for relief crews and all the costs that go with that'.

**Yes:** There are competency issues that surround the use of operational crews to provide emergency catering. These include the need for food hygiene certificates and the impact on core training activity

**Yes:** Letters of appreciation, DCFO House, CFO Wiltshire Fire Brigade, DO Shannon, CFO Eastwood, Hampshire Police.

**Yes:** Positive incident debrief reports (5) for Tangley House, Spaform, BEPCO, Southsea flooding, Burnaby Building.

On the other hand:

**No:** Negative incident debrief reports (3) Haines Farm, Woolton House, Hydron Ltd.

**No:** Page 4 of FBU in Hampshire review of fire service catering reports 'extra cost of £56,000 and the level of complaints has risen'

**No:** Hampshire FBU Emergency Catering Best Value Comparison suggests possible savings of £44,000 pa by reverting to the old Winchester based CaV system

### **3. 2 Consult – Emergency Catering**

In preparing the emergency catering part of this review the team have consulted the following:

Cllr Barron

CFA

Cllr Russell	CFA
DCFO House	HFRS
David Howells DCS	HFRS
T/ACO Bacon	HFRS
SDO Webb	HFRS
Dave Woods Manager ECU	HFRS
Jason Treasure	HCC Treasures
CFO Kemp	Somerset Fire Brigade
ACO Standing	Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
Peter Bates	FBU
Sue Brumitt	Unison

### **3.3 Compare – Emergency Catering**

In preparing this report we made comparisons with 10 other brigades with regard to the provision of catering, cost per annum, cost per incident, times used in the year as well as levels of satisfaction.

### **3.4 Compete – Emergency Catering**

The only identified source of competition has been proposed by the FBU to revert back to crewing arrangements using on duty or retained fire fighters..

Against this are the findings of HCC County Treasurers confidential internal audit report, page 2, conclusions 2.2 ‘We consider that the internal controls are adequate within emergency catering and should generally ensure that the service is delivered in an economic and efficient manner, etc.’

Other problems associated with the old Winchester CaV system are highlighted in DCFO House’s reports

Any return to the old arrangements would also need to take account of the costs of dismantling the new system.

Any return to the old arrangements would also need to take account of the costs of food hygiene regulations training for operational Firefighters.

A return to the old Winchester CaV system arrangements, or something very like them, would be the preferred option of the FBU.

## **4 HEADQUARTERS CATERING**

### **4.1 Challenge- Headquarters Catering**

External caterers currently provide catering facilities at Service Headquarters in Eastleigh on a 5-year contractual basis. The current catering contract is with Pabulum and was renewed early in 2002.

The current contract specifies that the following services be provided for staff, trainees and other visitors to Service headquarters.

Morning Coffee/Afternoon Tea/Lunch	Restaurant Service	Mon-Fri
Refreshments/Buffer lunch	Room Service	On Request
Functions	Harland Room	On Request
- Silver Service		
- Family Service		
- Buffet Service		

The contractors are required to supply a variety of hot and cold meals, snacks, desserts, salads, sandwiches, cakes, fruit and confectionery, etc.

#### Vending Services

There is only one cold water drinking dispenser on the Headquarters Site, which is located in the restaurant area. To enable staff to have hot and cold drinks outside the restaurant opening hours a vending machine, owned by HFRS, but stocked and maintained by Vendepac is provided at an additional cost of £700 per annum.

In preparing this report the review team asked the following questions:

#### **4.1.1 Do we need to provide catering at Service Headquarters?**

The available evidence suggested:

**Yes:** The 'Grey Book' lays out the national Conditions of Service for all uniformed Firefighters and officers. These clearly state that for operational personnel required to attend a local training centre, the Service must provide personnel with a free meal and beverages.

**Yes:** Non uniformed staff absent from their normal workplace are also entitled to a free lunch under the green book conditions..

**Yes:** Additional considerations include staff welfare, staff morale and public perceptions of the Service as an employer.

On the other hand:

**No:** The provision of 'free meals' for non-uniformed students or instructors is not a Condition of Service under 'Green Book' arrangements, but has been adopted as custom and practice in line with the 'Purple book' and 'Grey Book' arrangements.

**No:** At weekends retained firefighters undertaking training courses do not have the option of a 'free meal', instead they receive the subsistence allowance.

#### **4.1.2 Does the way we do it provide 'Best Value'?**

The available evidence suggested:

**Yes:** A customer survey was completed by the Office Services Supervisor in April 2001, and distributed to all staff based at Service Headquarters and recruit trainees. The express purpose of the survey was to obtain feedback on the perceived quality of the food and service provided by the current contractor, Pabulum.

The results indicate that the current contractors are performing to a satisfactory standard in terms of the quality, standard of service and value for money.

On the other hand:

**No:** There are no performance indicators in place to monitor the performance of the external caterers

#### **4.2 Consult – Headquarters Catering**

In preparing the Service Headquarter catering part of this review the team have consulted the following:

Cllr Barron	CFA
Cllr Russell	CFA
T/ACO Bacon	HFRS
SDO Webb	HFRS
Wendy Lambert	HFRS
Ann Marie Poxon	HFRS
Jason Treasure	HCC Treasures
Michelle Adams	Hampshire Constabulary
Jennifer Filer	Eastleigh Borough Council
Personnel Dept.	Hampshire Ambulance Service
Janice Howells	Pabulum
Carol Kane	Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service
CFO Kemp	Somerset Fire Brigade
ACO Standing	Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue Service
Catering Managers at	IBM, British American Tobacco, Ford's
Peter Bates	FBU
Sue Brumitt	Unison

### **4.3 Compare – Headquarters Catering**

In preparing this report the review team made comparisons with eight other brigades, as well as Hampshire Constabulary, with regard to type of provision, number of meals per week, cost of a meal, amount of subsidy and levels of satisfaction.

The project team felt that it was appropriate to establish the type of facilities provided by private sector employers operating within the vicinity of the Service Headquarters Eastleigh Site.

The following section provides comparator data for each of the three catering elements.

- a) Ford's (Southampton) – This site has a canteen that provides a full 24 hour service. External caterers are contracted to run the service and the facility is partially subsidized by Ford's. They were unwilling to provide details of the exact amount of subsidy.
- b) IBM (North Harbour site) – 5,500 employees work on this site. Use contract caterers to provide full catering facilities. No subsidy is provided.
- c) British American Tobacco (Southampton Docks) – 1,000 employees work on this site. Full restaurant facilities are provided daily for all staff. External caterers are used. All meals are totally free (fully subsidized) to the employee and forms part of the terms and conditions of employment.

The project team felt that it would also be appropriate to consider the cost of providing a restaurant facility at Headquarters that was resourced by directly employed staff. We obtained the salary data for a Catering Manager and 2 staff from a salary checker website. The cost of providing utilities such as Gas, Water and Electricity would remain the same as the Service currently provide these facilities. Capital outlay – no initial outlay would be required as a fully equipped canteen is currently provided. General maintenance and replacement costs for wear and tear would need to be taken in to account, as is the case at present. HFRS would need to provide a subsidy to cover the deficit between total costs and total revenue.

### **4.4 Compete – Headquarters Catering**

With reference to the previous section; the pricing of meals would appear to be competitive when compared with this sample of other brigades and organizations in the private sector. Although the amount of subsidy does vary significantly from being fully subsidized at one extreme and with no subsidy at the other extreme.

As the Service has only recently entered into a five-year contract with Pabulum to provide an HQ restaurant service, any changes would need to take account of costs involved in being released from this obligation.

The Service is obliged under existing agreed conditions of service either to provide free meals or a subsistence allowance to staff under certain circumstances. Consequently it could be considered that a legitimate source of competition could come from the removal of all HQ catering and replace it with a payment of a subsistence allowance where applicable. The costings showed that there would be no visible savings to be made by adopting this approach and we concluded that the cost of providing meals directly is a cheaper option than paying the allowance.

## **5. WATCH CATERING**

### **5. Challenge – Watch Catering**

The current provisions for watch/station catering are as follows:

All 44 watches on each of the Wholetime (WT) stations (not day crewed stations) have a mess club where a designated person is nominated as the ‘caterer’ for that watch. The caterer provides meals for all the personnel who opt to join the mess club. The cost of these meals are paid for entirely by the members of the mess club and priced by the watch caterer who also plans the menu for each tour of duty and purchases the food required.

The cost to the Authority for this service comes from providing a cook for each station concerned from Monday to Friday daytime only, and paying the watch caterer allowance of 3 hours overtime per tour of duty. The Service also incurs sundry costs such as provision of kitchens and equipment and upkeep costs plus provision of firefighting personnel to cover when cooks are absent.

Those who support the current system perceived it as providing necessary succour to fire-fighters who could, at any given moment, become embroiled in long drawn out physical activity. They would also contest that it is a long held tradition which can be seen to be very beneficial to team building and bonding on a watch.

When it was introduced many years ago this system was more of a necessity when longer shifts and 7 days - 7 nights were normal and the availability and choice of foodstuffs was limited compared to today. Nutritionally, times have also changed and demand for one or more hot meals per shift has lessened and healthier alternative options are now available.

Some useful background statistics relating to the current watch based catering system:

- 100% of watches provide catering facilities (44).
- All provide breakfast/lunch/evening meal and snacks/tea/coffee.
- All WT stations provide kitchen facilities (cookers/microwaves, etc).
- Out of a total of 521 personnel, 450 are ‘in the catering’ (86%).

- Out of a total of 44 watches, 16 have non-caterers (36%) who utilise the station cooks availability.
- There are 59 personnel (11%) who use the snack/tea/coffee facility only.
- There are 17 (38%) watches who provide reserve rations for personnel and/or appliances - funded mostly by HFRS.
- 6 meals plus snacks/tea/coffee are provided on average per person per tour.
- 23 (52%) watches utilise the station cook for planning menus.
- 34 (77%) watches utilise the station cook for preparing food for oncoming watches.
- 7 (16%) watches only, claim to have qualified personnel regarding food hygiene regulations.

In preparing this report the review team asked the following questions:

### **5.1.1 Should we support the current watch catering system?**

The available evidence suggested:

**Yes:** The ethos of mess clubs has been a long tradition within brigades and it has become accepted practice that cooks and kitchens are provided on stations at no cost to personnel.

**Yes:** To date no fire authorities contacted have found it possible to charge personnel towards the cost of catering to the same level as achieved in other organisations.

**Yes:** 100% of HFRS watches provide catering facilities (44).

**Yes:** 450 out of 521 personnel are in the catering club (86%).

**Yes:** 91% of all other brigades operate the same or a very similar system to HFRS.

**Yes:** The relatively low value of catering provisions suggests minimal potential for savings to be made by using alternative commercial providers.

On the other hand:

**No:** There is no statutory duty for a fire authority to provide cooks and kitchens on fire stations

**No:** The fact that cooks are only on stations for weekday day shifts, means that operational fire-fighters are used to prepare the watch meals on night shifts and at weekends. This has an impact on the time available for mainstream fire service work

**No:** There are cost implications in getting all wholetime fire-fighters trained in food hygiene under the Food Hygiene Regulations.

**No:** The provision of a cook to prepare wholetime fire fighter's meals, entirely at the cost of the fire authority, is an additional benefit not enjoyed by other members of staff.

## **5.2 Consult – Watch Catering**

In preparing the Watch catering part of this review the team have consulted the following:

Watch Caterers - Wholetime Stations  
Carol Kane - Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service  
CFO Kemp - Somerset Fire Brigade  
ACO Standing - Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service  
CFO Doyle - Cleveland Fire and Rescue Service  
Peter Bates - FBU Hampshire  
Sue Brumitt - UNISON Hampshire  
Cllr Barron - CFA  
Cllr Russell - CFA  
IBM  
British American Tobacco  
Ford Southampton  
Basingstoke and North Hants District Hospital  
QA Hospital Portsmouth  
Kingston Prison  
Winchester Prison

## **5.3 Compare – Watch Catering**

Comparison of catering provisions provided by other brigades and establishments:

- Cumbria Fire Service and Cleveland Fire Service have withdrawn the subsidy completely and no catering service is offered on station.
- Merseyside Fire Service have a policy of not filling vacant cooks posts and are thus gradually withdrawing the service.
- County Durham Fire Service and Gloucestershire Fire Service both operate on a 40% subsidy level.
- All other brigades operate the same or very similar system to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service.

- Winchester Prison. No provisions provided, officers eat in the hospital opposite or self cater. They had a similar system to Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service until it closed due to building work. It is not known whether or not it will re-open again.
- Kingston Prison, Portsmouth. Personnel on night duty can purchase a meal at the inmates canteen.
- Fords (Southampton). System is partially subsidised and provides a canteen with full 24-hour service plus vending machines for tea/coffee.
- IBM Northharbour, Portsmouth use contract caterers providing full catering facilities and retail outlet. It used to be subsidised but now only provided at full cost (5,500 employees).
- Basingstoke and North Hants District Hospital. Provide full catering with staff canteen and vending machines. The cost of food, only, is recovered from staff paying for their meals. In-house workforce employed to feed patients also cover the staff restaurant.
- British American Tobacco, Southampton (1,000 employees). Full restaurant facilities for 1,000 a day, provided by contractor and is fully subsidised providing totally free meals as part of employees conditions of service.

#### **5.4 Compete – Watch Catering**

Strictly speaking, the only true form of competition that could be considered would come from the private sector. The relatively low numbers involved would probably rule this out.

Any other competition could only be achieved by varying the amount of employer / employees contribution, both in time and money, made to providing on station catering facilities.

In considering any such adjustment the following information needs to be considered:

The average price per meal paid by fire-fighters on stations under the current catering system

Currently WT stations have one cook (25 hours per week)

Watch caterers receive 3 hours overtime

One option explored was to remove the watch caterer system altogether and remove the necessity for fire-fighters to have to prepare communal meals at nights and weekends. To use the money saved in caterer's overtime to pay for a greater level of provision of professional cooking staff who would also be responsible for purchasing all the food needed.

The station cooks would recover the cost of the food purchased by charging the fire-fighters a fee for each meal that would reflect the cost of the ingredients. Cost will be based on agreed parameters and reflect the current average cost per meal.

It would, in all probability, involve the appointment of more than one cook to cover seven days working on each station, with the associated employment costs. This might be offset to some extent by savings to be made by not having to provide fire-fighters with food hygiene training.

## **6 CONCLUSIONS**

### **6.1 Emergency Catering**

There is overwhelming evidence for the need to provide some form of refreshments / feeding at operational incidents

Compared with other brigades, Hampshire enjoys a high level of emergency catering provision.

The general consensus is that the service and food provided by the ECU is good.

The cost of providing the ECU is high when compared with other brigades. However, this has to be viewed in the context of the reliability of the comparable information provided by other brigades and the cost of supporting the old, or alternative, arrangements.

### **Options for the Provision of Emergency Catering**

Having considered all the available evidence the following options presented themselves for consideration:

- Continue with the current arrangements. This provides a high quality and reliable service but at a seemingly high cost. This is the preferred option of DCFO House.
- Revert to the original system of using operational personnel to crew the ECU, This is the preferred option of the FBU. This might show some savings but it would raise issues surrounding crewing levels and the disbanding of the existing team.
- Explore the use of an outside provider such as the Salvation Army or WRVS. This would undoubtedly show some savings. However as well as the issue of the cost of disbanding the existing ECU team, it has to be remembered that this option has been tried in the past with limited success. (During the meeting of the BV project team on 17 January 2002, this option was discussed, considered and rejected)
- Explore to possibility of contracting out emergency feeding to a commercial organization. There is no available evidence of any other Brigade successfully taking this approach. Given the 365 day a year and very short notice requirements any such contract is likely to

prove very expensive. (During the meeting of the BV project team on 17 January 2002, this option was discussed, considered and rejected)

- Keep the existing Emergency Catering arrangements but utilize the purchasing power of a centrally managed Service wide catering effort to provide the food for the team to use. This would have the potential to show some savings on the food bill for the team. This is the preferred option of Elected members. (During the meeting of the BV project team on 17 January 2002, this option was discussed, considered and rejected)

## **6.2 HQ Catering**

The general consensus is that the service and food provided by the Pabulum contractors is satisfactory.

The provision of a the HQ restaurant facility costs the Service in excess of £100,000 pa

The review identified that replacing free meals (where there was an entitlement) with a subsistence allowance would not show any savings

The comparisons made with other employers proved on the whole inconclusive due to the wide variations in the levels of service and subsidy provided.

Given that a 5-year contract was signed with Pabulum at the beginning of 2002 the review team have been left with little room to make any immediate meaningful recommendations.

However, there is evidence that some of the free meal provisions made for staff visiting or working at HQ is something that would benefit from further scrutiny.

At some time in the future it might be prudent to look at the possibility of directly employing the restaurant staff currently provided by Pabulum. On the figures available this would require a smaller subsidy compared to the current subsidy needed to support the contract system. Plus there are penalties to extricate HFRS from the current contract.

## **6.3 Watch Catering**

In reviewing the case for the provision of catering facilities on wholetime shift fire stations the review team considered:

The current system is popular with the staff using it and is seen by many as a traditional and valuable aspect of station life.

The current provision of cooks only during the daytime Monday to Friday means that there are many occasions when qualified, highly trained fire-fighters are spending valuable time preparing meals for colleagues.

The cooks and kitchens are provided by the Service free of charge for the use by station based staff. This amounts to a level of subsidy not enjoyed by other staff. Although HQ based staff are able to purchase subsidised meals in the HQ staff restaurant.

Given the scale involved it is not thought likely that the provision of fire-fighter's meals would be attractive to the commercial sector

Currently, a night watch sits down to a cooked breakfast before going off duty at 0900hrs. The majority of the team found this difficult to justify. It certainly could not be justified on the previously stated grounds of having to sustain crews due to them undertaking heavy manual work.

The recent introduction of food hygiene regulations imposes a significant training burden if fire-fighters are to continue to be involved in the preparation of communal meals.

Paying overtime to the watch caterer to do the shopping during their off duty periods could be construed as having a negative impact on the individual's work life balance.

Alterations to the current system could only be achieved by varying the amount of employer / employee's contribution, both in time and money, made to providing station catering facilities.

The comparisons made with non-fire service employers proved on the whole inconclusive due to the wide variations in the levels of service and subsidy provided.

Having considered all the available evidence the following options presented themselves for consideration:

- No provision of cooks on station, only a caterer on each watch (not generally supported due to the loss of Unison members jobs, an increase in non fire service work for fire-fighters)
- Cooks provided but staff contribute towards same level of subsidy as at HQ (would result in much higher prices for personnel)
- One caterer per station instead of one per watch. An obvious increased workload including hours and allowances with no tangible monetary savings.
- Cook to become cook/caterer for whole station. They would recover the cost of the food purchased by charging the fire fighters a fee for each meal that would reflect the cost of the ingredients. This would inevitably need full time cover by cooks in order to buy provisions, deliver to station, etc, and obviously increased wage and allowances bill for the cooks but saving on caterers and their allowances.. Cost will be based on agreed parameters and reflect the current average cost per meal.
- Remove both major financial outlays, i.e., cooks and watch caterers, and offer a small subsidy to accommodate self caterers. A major saving could be made whilst still

maintaining a semblance of a watch catering system. (not supported by Unison due to the loss of members jobs)

- HFRS take over all aspects of catering provision through a trading account and charge staff for their meals (not feasible under the terms of the current 5 year Pabulum contract)
- Completely withdraw all facilities (cooks, caterers) except for provision of a kitchen offering basic requirements - microwave(s), fridge, tea/coffee making facility. (Not generally supported for reasons already stated).

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Having collated all appropriate data and reviewed the possible options, the project team would like to put forward the following recommendations for consideration by the full Best Value Review Team:

1. **Emergency Catering** - No change to the current arrangements in place. Note FBU would like to revert to the original Canteen Van (CaV) arrangements where by the CaV was crewed by operational personnel.
2. **HQ Catering** - In light of the new contract being signed with Pabulum the project team would suggest that a review of the subsidy and allowances provided to some members of staff is undertaken with a view to determine any possible savings and eliminate any anomalies. At least one year before renewing the contract next time a full study should be undertaken to determine if better value could be achieved by putting the HQ restaurant under HFRS control and directly employing the staff.
3. **Watch Catering** - The options appear to be retaining the status quo (favoured by the FBU). Alternatively remove the watch caterer system altogether and remove the necessity for fire fighters to have to prepare communal meals. To use the money saved in caterer's overtime to pay for a greater level of provision of professional cooking staff who would also be responsible for purchasing all the food needed. They would recover the cost of the food purchased by charging the fire fighters a fee for each meal that would reflect the cost of the ingredients. The majority view was in favour of the latter. Additionally it was thought that when the HQ catering provision was reviewed in three years time, the option of a centralised catering arrangement to service the needs of fire stations should also be considered.

## 8 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. **Emergency catering** – The current provision, although relatively expensive, is well thought of and more than satisfies the Service's statutory and moral obligations for incident feeding. Other than to continue with the current arrangements, the only other viable option, as suggested by the FBU, is to return to the old arrangements of using operational crews to provide the feeding at incidents.

2. **HQ Catering** – The current contract with Pabulum still has over 4 years to run, therefore leaving little scope for any immediate action. The alternative of closing the restaurant and paying out allowances, where staff are entitled to a free meal, would show an increase in cost. Consequently it is recommended that the current arrangements continue, however there is scope for a further review of who is entitled to free meals and why. Also it would be a valuable exercise to compare the cost of directly employing the restaurant staff before the current contract is due for renewal.
  
3. **Watch based catering** – There is a long tradition to the current system and it is greatly valued by station based staff. However it is thought that using highly trained Firefighters for shopping and cooking is not the best use of their time. The situation is further complicated by the introduction of food hygiene regulations that add a training requirement to any one preparing food for others. The majority support a proposal to scrap the watch caterer overtime system and to use the money saved to increase the role of the professional cooks on stations. This view is not supported by the FBU who would support the status quo.

**END**

**Hampshire Fire & Rescue Service**

**Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare**

**Food Safety**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In 1998 we produced a Catering Guide for use on wholetime fire stations where we employ cooks. This was produced in consultation with the local authority's environmental health officers. At the time it was sufficient and recognised as best practice.
- 1.2 The basic aim of safe catering is to ensure that food is prepared and hazards, such as harmful bacteria, are not allowed to multiply to levels such as to cause food poisoning. Essential elements of ensuring hazards are eliminated is the understanding and correct systematic control of hazards. This can be achieved by training employees and ensuring that controls as well as monitoring procedures are in place.
- 1.3 The Regulations were updated and we fell behind. Unlike previous requirements the Regulations placed increased emphasis on controlling risks and on the control of practices and procedures.
- 1.4 The applicable legislation is the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995 and the Food Safety (Temperature Controls) Regulations 1995.

**2. Legislative Requirements**

- 2.1 To identify all steps that are critical to food safety (Reg 4(3) (a-c) and to ensure adequate safety controls are in place, maintained and reviewed (Reg 4(3) (d-e). Effectively this means:
  - ◆ Examining the process from the initial purchase of food, transportation, storage, preparation and service.
  - ◆ Food hazards should be identified at every step and controls implemented to eliminate the hazard.
  - ◆ These are the principles that underpin a formal process known as HACCP (hazard analysis and critical control points).

**3. Example Elements of the HACCP**

- 3.1 Food purchasing may be subject to the following hazards:
  - ◆ Microbiological (food poisoning and food spoilage bacteria)
  - ◆ Chemical (such as contamination from cleaning fluids)
  - ◆ Physical (things like dented cans, flies, foreign objects)
- 3.2 Controls need to be implemented to ensure that such hazards are eliminated. Food should be checked for the presence of physical and chemical hazards at the time of

purchase. To control microbiological hazards food must be subject to strict temperature control throughout the entire process.

- 3.3 **Food storage.** Bacterial growth and further contamination may occur if food is stored incorrectly. Food must be stored at the correct temperature, covered and wrapped. Records of temperatures for food storage must be recorded, stock should be rotated and the means to identify these must be included within the HACCP
- 3.4 **Food Preparation.** Cross contamination and bacterial growth can occur when foods are handled incorrectly. In order to control these hazards handling times, good personal hygiene, use of clean equipment and training are essential. Training would need to be provided and documented systems implemented to ensure that cleaning schedules are implemented so that work surfaces and equipment are left safe for use.

#### 4. Current Arrangements

- 4.1 The existing system is non compliant with the regulations and in the worst case scenario we are at risk of prosecution.
- 4.2 The part time cook is the only person who has received food safety training. Fire fighters regularly handle food and prepare meals for themselves and colleagues and have received no formal training.

#### 5. To Achieve Compliance

- 5.1 **Training.** Schedule 1 Chapter X of the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations requires that all staff be trained in food hygiene practises commensurate to their work (food handling) activity.
- 5.2 In the event of an outbreak of food poisoning we would need a defence of 'due diligence'. Having sought advice from a consultant EHO the basic level of training necessary for firefighters is estimated as being a 3 hour tailor made training course, including handouts, with a 20 minute multiple choice assessment (to ensure understanding and to create an audit trail).
- 5.3 **Cleaning Schedules.** The Regulations require that all articles, fittings, equipment, etc, that food comes into contact with must be kept clean and in good order, repair and condition in order to minimise the risk of food contamination. HFRS would need a documented cleaning schedule that detailed daily, weekly and quarterly requirements. This would need formal implementation and monitoring to ensure equipment and surfaces remain hygienic (and again to create an audit trail for the due diligence defence).
- 5.4 **HACCP.** HFRS would need to identify all the steps in the food business that are critical to food safety and to ensure that adequate safety procedures are identified, implemented, maintained and reviewed. A generic HACCP could be developed for issue to each fire station where it could be adopted and adapted for local arrangements. This would only work if the training had been provided and responsibility for the HACCP and its monitoring had been assigned.
- 5.5 **Costings** for compliance have not been identified. Trainers must be qualified to the higher level in food safety. One option may be for some cooks to become

qualified and for them to cascade the training to firefighters. By far the biggest implication is the impact on operational time within an already busy schedule for training for core activities.

- 5.6 **Kitchens** will require regular inspection to ensure they are of a consistently high standard. We would need a rolling programme for improvement to keep them to a high enough standard to satisfy the scrutiny of EHO inspectors.

Manager, Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare  
15/07/03