

2018.11.20

4. Senator K.L. Moore of the Chairman of the States Employment Board regarding the prospect of redundancies in the public sector: [OQ.191/2018]

Will the chairman tell the Assembly how many jobs, if any, are due to be made redundant in the public sector and from which departments?

The Connétable of St. Ouen (Vice-Chairman, States Assembly Board - rapporteur):

I would advise the details of the organisational structures with the new target operating model are expected to be complete by the end of March 2019. At that stage, the States Employment Board will review each of the directorates' plans as part of its assurance accountabilities prior to implementation. There will also be an extensive process of consultation with staff. The roll-out process thereafter will involve assessing all affected staff, then job matching where there is a match between an individual and the job in the new structure. Those unmatched staff will join a pool and will then join a recruitment process for those other available roles within the States, following the implementation. It is only at the end of this process that we will have a clear picture of those staff likely to be impacted by redundancy. In order to minimise any job losses, if there are to be any, we are already managing headcount by restricting new permanent hires prior to the outcome of the implementation of the target operating model, and this is likely to be up into quarter 4 2019. As an employer we have always tried to minimise redundancy wherever possible, and this process is no different. At this stage therefore - and I am sorry it has taken a while to get to the answer - it is not possible to determine how many, if any jobs, may be made redundant until the process I have described is complete.

3.4.1 Senator K.L. Moore:

I am presuming the rapporteur is the vice-chairman of the States Employment Board, I do not recall myself.

The Deputy Bailiff:

My understanding is you are the deputy chairman, are you not?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

That is correct, and unfortunately the chairman has been taken unwell so that is a double reason why I have to answer this question.

Senator K.L. Moore:

My question to the vice-chairman is: why can no greater clarity be given on the answer due to the fact that on the Channel Islands tender portal there has been a contract advertised for the provision of an external out-placement services and career development portal? The contract, which is due to start on 31st October this year and end on 31st January next year, so it appears that there is indeed a plan in place to manage what is termed to be redundancy, I think in common parlance.

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

The Senator is indeed correct. We are engaging an out-placement service, which is all part of the process of delivering this. It does not mean to say that we know the numbers. We just suspect that there will be people who unfortunately will be made redundant, and it is ensuring that the out-placement services are there to cater for them, as and when they are identified.

3.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

While I can accept that the Assistant Minister cannot give any definitive answers for March next year, the target operating model to produce this slimming down of the workforce has targets, does it not? What does the Assistant Minister have for targets in terms of what he expects to see over the coming year?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

The targets are financial, not people targets. We know that the new structure will be slimmer but, as the Deputy I am sure is aware, there is also a very large amount of vacancies in the States and we are hoping that we will be able to use at least some of these people to fill those vacancies. I fully accept, before he asks the question, that will not probably include nurses and firemen and policemen because some of the States employees will not be able to fit into those roles. Nevertheless, it is our intention to minimise redundancies by using up the vacancies that we have and also not filling any vacancies that come up between now and the implementation so that they are available to people who are displaced through this process.

3.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Did I hear or mishear the Assistant Minister say that a suspension of appointments would last until quarter 4 of next year? If so, does he not realise that that is a massive saving in itself if we do not appoint for a period of time?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I understand the Deputy's point and we are trying to juggle balls between keeping roles that are essential to the operation of the States manned and also not removing opportunities for people who might be displaced with this by appointing people permanently. We are using temporary cover where possible. It is just an unfortunate consequence that this is the way it has to happen, and it will be unfair to the current workforce if we were to employ permanent people and then have to make people who have been with us for a while redundant. So it is a balancing act. I accept that it is a drawn-out process but I can assure the Deputy that as and when a particular target model for a department is complete, and we have used up all the people in the pool that would be available, we will start recruiting.

3.4.4 Deputy K.F. Morel:

Can the Assistant Minister explain why the regime that you referred to as being one of minimising new permanent hires does not apply to the most senior levels of the civil service and the Communications Department?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

The answer to that is quite simple. The hires that we made have been using an open selections process in which local people were able to apply and, indeed, a number did. But unfortunately, they did not make it through to the final selection process and therefore people from outside the Island were appointed into those roles.

Deputy K.F. Morel:

That was not an answer to my question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Would you like to put your question ...

Deputy K.F. Morel:

I will restate the question. Can the Assistant Minister explain why this regime of minimising new permanent hires does not appear to apply to the most senior levels of the civil service, including the Communications Department?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

I apologise to the Deputy. I perhaps missed his point. In essence, because those roles are essential to lead and develop the organisation as we go forward and therefore we have to recruit immediately. That criteria will apply to any role, which is absolutely essential to the running of the States.

3.4.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

Can the Assistant Minister provide clarity around his use of the phrase “temporary positions”? Does he mean zero hours contracts, which are perhaps being used for more longer-term contracts or short-term contracts?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

It is quite difficult to be specific when one is describing a huge number of roles, but as the Deputy well knows, we have used zero-hours contracts in the past and for short-term cover they will be used again. The hires will largely be short-term contracts.

3.4.6 Senator K.L. Moore:

Yesterday, at a Public Accounts Committee hearing, the chief executive told the panel that in this important area it was important to be quick with this process. Would the vice-chair agree that engagement with staff on this important matter has been lacking at a time when it would be more productive to generate a positive approach to tackling and delivering public sector change?

The Connétable of St. Ouen:

The short answer is yes, I would totally agree with her point and it is a point I have made to the chief executive on a number of occasions, that there is room for improvement in the communication process.