

4.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding vacant posts across States Departments:

Will the Chief Minister advise how many posts across departments are either vacant and awaiting appointment, filled by an agency worker or filled by a consultant and explain how such posts are accounted for in the headcount targets agreed for each department with the Council of Ministers or the States Employment Board?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

There are 979 and a half full-time equivalent positions vacant across departments of which just under half are under active recruitment and 183 are covered by temporary staff. This includes new positions created as a result of decisions to invest in our priority areas across the life of the Medium Term Financial Plan. This headcount is agreed and managed through the plan and monitored internally. We do this for the same reasons as any organisation, to manage costs, and as we reform areas such as Infrastructure, Health and Education it can help provide protection for staff and flexibility for the organisation.

4.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Chief Minister aware that the easiest way to save money apparently in the system is to delay appointment of replacement staff by let us say 6 months and you get 6 months' salary not being paid and, therefore, available for other purposes? Does he consider that the levels he quoted are really about meeting financial targets rather than protecting the workforce?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Not at all. On the one hand the Deputy's explanation might seem to be appropriate but the reality is the Medium Term Financial Plan is a 4-year plan and departments will manage vacancies to deliver change and reform within their own department so that perhaps where they have had 3 vacancies going forward they only need 2. That is what we would expect them to do. That is what this plan is about, delivering efficiencies which are sustainable throughout the course of the 4 years and beyond.

4.5.2 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

I wonder if the Chief Minister could explain why in a recent investigation carried out by Scrutiny it was revealed that a vacancy rate occurs at Infrastructure between 23 and 27 per cent. If Infrastructure are managing without these staff, why are they still being held open as vacancies?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not know what this recent investigation being referred to is, but the Deputy knows that the Infrastructure Department is managing its staff in a different way as it is transforming the way that it provides services. That is appropriate. When vacancies become available, it would be wrong for the department to simply fill them with full-time permanent positions when they know that they are in a period of transformation. That is what we want departments to do so that ultimately over the course of the 4 years the money will come out of the bottom line of the budget and the headcount will reduce as well.

4.5.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

Is the Minister saying that this is part of the transformation programme with Infrastructure, that is why they are running such a high vacancy rate, and those vacancies will not be filled, they will be extinguished as it is part of the plan for reducing the size of the public sector? Can he confirm that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Absolutely.

4.5.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

If I may move on, the question talks about use of agency workers. Does he accept that Social Security's extensive use of agency workers - 142 over a 2-year period, only 12 of which were on projects - is another way of manipulating the headcount numbers because they do not count because they are supposedly temporarily employed, temporarily employed through agencies where they are on zero hours contracts, in fact? Is this not another way to massage and manipulate the headcount figures that he receives?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is not a way to massage and manipulate headcount figures. It is a way to run departments with appropriate staffing, not only for the long-term day-to-day work but for the project work that departments want to undertake. Members of this Assembly, members of the public, have been criticising the States for overemploying, spending too much money, not managing projects, and departments are now doing just that. Where they have a project, they are taking on temporary work. Where they are looking to long-term day-to-day work, they are reforming and changing the way they deliver that work. I know that the Deputy visits Social Security. If he were to go round the department with the Minister, with the officers, he would see a transformed department where they are doing more with relatively fewer staff and for less money. They are a model department that others are following.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Sir, I do not get a second supplementary on that, do I?

The Bailiff:

You do not, no.