

23.07.17

8 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Chief Minister regarding zero hours contracts (OQ.150/2023)

I will try to do it as quickly as I can. Further to the Chief Minister's statement on 4th July 2023 that £800,000 in savings had been achieved by changing zero-hours contracts to full-time contracts for a section of the workforce, will she state the titles, grades and departments of the employees concerned, explain how this change achieved those savings, and indicate what proportion of the overall workforce is currently on zero-hours contracts?

The Connétable of St. John (Assistant Chief Minister - rapporteur):

Thank you for the question. The question is quite complex inasmuch as I would prefer to supply a written answer to some of the points, but I will try and answer as much as I can. The workforce use of zero-hours contracts is, in my opinion, far too high. Currently, we have 3,851 zero-hour contracts in place, with some 2,000 of those being used in the last 12 months. We are looking to put people on annualised hours rather than zero hours where we know that they are only available, for example, within school terms. Perhaps they may work in health, and I think it would be much better if they were on an annualised contract, giving them certainty and giving us certainty as an employer. Having so many people on zero hours that we are not using ... and in some cases it may be the same person who holds more than one zero-hour contract. They may be on a zero-hour contract for a lunchtime assistant and a zero-hour contract for breakfast support. We know that we are going to have lunch and breakfast; we should be putting these people on contracts of employment which are permanent. When we are paying for licences for people, it costs us a lot of money for D.B.S. (Disclosure and Barring Service) checks where people are not being used, for licences, for email addresses, et cetera. We have saved some £200,000 by introducing a new system called Optima, which allows for us to roster people 6 weeks in advance rather than going week by week. This is giving us surety and giving the staff surety and we are looking to further enhance that system as we go forward.

4.8.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I think that may well have answered my question quite accurately. Could the Assistant Minister send me or assure me of the mechanism by which this Optima system works? Because I find it rather difficult to imagine that zero-hours contracts, being the cheapest form of employment, that any savings can be made at all by shifting from zero-hours contracts to full-time contracts. Could he guarantee that I get access to the Optima system?

The Connétable of St. John:

The Deputy will be second in line after me to see that system. I will be happy to share the system with the Deputy.

4.8.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

I just wonder whether the Assistant Minister could confirm whether Deputy Gorst is one of those zero-hours contracts at the moment? That was all. [Laughter]

The Connétable of St. John:

It would appear that it is not a fixed-term contract because we do not know the end date. [Laughter]

4.8.3 Deputy M.B. Andrews:

I think many constituents would be interested to know in response to my written question there are now 949 vacancies across every government department there is. So what are the States Employment Board going to do to ensure that payroll expenditure savings will be made moving forward?

The Connétable of St. John:

It is a very good question. It is an area that we are looking at. We have put a lot of resource and effort into recruitment and retention. We are currently reporting on vacancies where that work is being covered by somebody on a zero-hour contract. Where I said earlier where we can use annualised hours, where we know that somebody is going to be available for 37 or 38 weeks a year, we should be putting those people on an annualised contract where we only have to then worry about the 14 weeks. It also gives that person guaranteed income and the ability to join a pension scheme.