

2020.05.12

19 Deputy I. Gardiner of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding supply of labour in essential areas during Covid-19 (OQ.131/2020)

Will the Minister advise what plans, if any, are in place to ensure that on-Island workers are redeployed, in the first instance, before any outside workers are brought in to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of labour in essential areas during the COVID-19 crisis?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

I have set out the plans and actions being taken across Government in this area in the written answer to the Deputy's question 181. The Government's top priority is to support the population move safely through the safe-exit framework so travel to and from the Island is not allowed except in exceptional circumstances. Outside labour is currently not being brought to the Island and this will not be permitted until at least level 2 of the framework is reached. But I am confident for now that we have the workforce we need on-Island to support Island businesses in this difficult time. The latest economic indicators report from Statistics Jersey has confirmed that over 2,500 people were registered as actively seeking work on 3rd May. The Back-to-Work team is supporting all these workers into vacancies that are available wherever possible and will continue to work with employers to match people into more roles as they become available. Back-to-Work services have been extended to support workers with under 5 years' residence. Ministers have also made temporary changes to support the use of on-Island workers. Control of Housing and Work Law controls have temporarily been amended to allow registered and licensed workers to take up any vacant job for up to 3 months where the vacancy has been made due to a worker leaving Jersey. I am also aware of the good work being undertaken within commercial organisations to redeploy staff within and between businesses to support priority areas.

4.19.1 Deputy I. Gardiner:

Following the answer that I have received, we have now 1,260 new people on income support, 6,608 people on payroll and 380 on the career scheme. It means that about 8,000 more people have been financially supported since mid-March, which is absolutely right within the current situation. Going forward, does the Minister accept that bringing labour into Jersey, even in the level 2 of our exit strategy, will increase the risk of re-infection with COVID while more than 8,000 people are under-employed and should not happen, would he bring to the Assembly a plan to make full use of our locals as a first choice of human resources?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, the Government does recognise the risk of relaxing restrictions on incoming people to the Island, as I mentioned in a previous answer. We do currently have good plans in place, good processes currently underway, and a lot of very good work going on by the Back-to-Work team to redeploy currently workers that are actively seeking work into as many jobs as possible. Obviously there are still one or 2 skills gaps, which are causing problems, but I do believe that we are doing our very best and that on the whole it is working well.