

20.11.17

2 Deputy C.S. Alves of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding the employment of social workers in the States of Jersey (OQ.341/2020):

Will the Minister advise how many social worker vacancies there are currently in the States of Jersey and how many social workers have left employment in the last 12 months?

Deputy R.J. Renouf of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

I can advise Members that there is a funded establishment of 33 social work posts in Health and Community Services and of those 13 are vacant posts with 9 of the vacancies covered by locums and 2 vacancies covered by secondments from within H.C.S. (Health and Community Services). Interviews have taken place and offers made for 2 of the vacancies and interviews take place this week for the secondment posts. No social workers have left H.C.S. in the last 12 months. The question asks me about social worker vacancies across the whole States of Jersey, so of course Children, Young People, Education and Skills also have social workers in their teams. I have been advised that within C.Y.P.E.S. (Children, Young People, Education and Skills) there are 47 social workers with 20 vacancies, 20 senior practitioners with 3 vacancies and 17 managers with one vacancy. Many of those vacancies are of course filled by locums. In the last 12 months, 6 permanent staff left that service, which is not an unusual figure. C.Y.P.E.S. continue to actively recruit, including via Let's Be Honest website. There is investment in training to retain staff and financial support provided to students on the social work course at Highlands College.

4.2.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Is the Minister aware whether exit interviews are taking place and if there is any data collected as to the reasons why social workers are leaving?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I am not directly aware of that. As I said, within H.C.S. there have been no departures within the last 12 months. I am not aware of C.Y.P.E.S. procedures.

4.2.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister believe that the support and training for social workers is adequate to retain and recruit staff for what is such an important and challenging profession?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

In recent years the Government has recognised the importance of recruiting and retaining and growing our own social workers and for that reason has established the course at Highlands College, which was validated in 2019, began in September 2019 with the first intake of 12 students. I am advised there are currently 10 students in year 1 and 11 in year 2. All of last year's cohorts successfully passed their first year and the first year to graduate will be in 2022, so clearly there is a significant change in recruitment from within the Island.

4.2.3 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Really the question was about current social workers and whether they are ongoing in service training, and support was adequate to retain and support them in their role. Does the Minister believe that that element of social work is adequate?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

Not being a professional social worker, it is difficult for me personally to assess adequacy but there is training which must follow a national set programme and, as it would do so, it must be deemed an adequate and, I am sure, a good and worthwhile training programme.

4.2.4 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Does the Minister not recognise, since he is carrying something like close to 50 per cent vacancy rates, that whatever measures he has taken to increase recruitment in this area it has so far failed? What new initiatives will he undertake in order to fill this gap?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It is not a 50 per cent vacancy rate either within H.C.S. or within C.Y.P.E.S. The greater vacancy rate is within C.Y.P.E.S. but of course it should not be thought that that work is not being done because there are locums carrying out that work. The remainder of the Deputy's question, it will be a matter for the Minister for Children and Housing when he gets his feet under the desk, I am afraid. He is nodding at me beside me. I cannot really speak for that department as to what measures it may wish to take.

4.2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern:

I make 13 vacancies out of 33, very close to 50 per cent, and similar figures from C.Y.P.E.S. Does the Minister not accept it is approximately 50 per cent?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

It may be closer to 40 per cent. The numbers are there and it is well-known that within social work across the whole of the United Kingdom there are shortages. It is very usual for social work authorities to have to fill those posts by means of locums. We should not think that locums do any lesser job though obviously it is best to have those vacancies filled with permanent staff and all the efforts of the department are to achieve that.

4.2.6 Deputy C.S. Alves:

Does the Minister feel that he has an adequate number of social workers within his remit, not C.Y.P.E.S., especially now that the Jersey Care Model is going to be implemented and that people will be at the centre of that?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I do not recall receiving any representations that the number is insufficient. I think we can always work better and, to that end, within H.C.S. our adult social work team has recently combined with Adult Mental Health Services and are working together as one care group, which I believe will deliver better, more co-ordinated care.