



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
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PRESS RELEASE

No: 36/2011

Date: 8th February 2011.

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“Buildings & Works Agreement will transform the service to Government housing tenants”.

The Agreement between the Government and Unite, which has now been approved by staff and was signed on Friday, launches the Buildings and Works Department into a new, modern era ridding it of its historical, negative image and poor quality service. It also represents a transformation of the quality of service to tenants.

The Department will convert into an Agency of the Government to be known as the Housing Works Agency and in March will move into a new, well resourced depot and workshop with modern facilities in the Waterport Area behind Customs House. The Agency will undergo a complete rebranding and operate under a distinctive and professional organisational identity.

Government Housing tenants will see a transformation in the quality of service. Under the Agency's new operating model Government housing in Gibraltar will be divided into six zones and each zone will have a workforce and management allocated to it on a dedicated basis. Staff in a particular zone work force will only earn the bonus pay if at the end of each quarter no tenant in that zone has been waiting more than three months for work to be done. This creates a direct link between the earnings of staff and the quality of service they give to tenants. The cost of the bonus to Government remains the same as at present.

There will be a separate unit dealing with the refurbishment of empty flats. Staff working in this unit will only earn bonus pay if flats are refurbished within a maximum set period of time. This will result in flats lying empty for less time before they can be reallocated to waiting tenants.

The Agency will also get smaller and thus more cost effective. Older workers have been offered a voluntary early exit scheme. Forty workers have already applied to leave and will not be replaced. There are no minimum manning levels for the future.

The Government will also be free to put out any work in Government housing to private sector contractors, thus ensuring its ability to deliver a quality service to tenants.

Commenting on this historic agreement, Chief Minister Peter Caruana said:

“This is the latest, and perhaps the most important step in the Government’s extensive programme to date of reform and modernisation of the public service. It is in a sense one of the most important too date since it tackles head on one of the most historically problematic and rightly derided areas of the public sector. It represents very good news for long suffering tenants and a new start for this important public service to them.

The agreement also offers Staff the prospect of a well paid, valued career and job satisfaction in a more disciplined and well regarded work environment, in which Government will invest heavily. In exchange they must provide a good quality service to tenants, who will not be expected to wait more than 3 months for work to be done. If the Agency doesn’t deliver a repair in three months the employees in that zone lose their bonuses (worth 25% of salary) and the Government is able to get the private sector to do the work. The current bonus scheme is not linked to tenant waiting times and thus does not deliver service quality to tenants still less does it ensure it.

The improved service to tenants comes with reduced costs in the future for taxpayers with a streamlined, reduced size, more efficient and productive Agency.

The old Buildings and Works and its historical inefficient, insufficiently productive and undisciplined employee practices has no place in modern Gibraltar and will now be a thing of the past. In its place will now emerge a more productive, efficient and motivated organisation, focused on delivering a quality service.

Given the large historical backlog of pending works and the need to set up and resource the new Agency, it is not possible to deliver the new service from day one. There needs to be a transition period and the current backlog will not have been fully eliminated until September this year. The waiting time will reduce to the three months specified in the Agreement by the end of this year.

However, many tenants should begin to see a new and invigorated level of activity quite soon. The Government will communicate separately with tenants in respect of the details of the new system of work, including the transitional arrangements for the elimination of the historical backlog of work.

I want to congratulate and thank the leadership of Unite, Charles Sisarello and Victor Ochello and convenor Pepe Gaiviso for sharing the Government’s vision of the need for a new start, for a better deal for tenants and taxpayers and for joining the Government in delivering all these while also achieving a better future, with better earnings and working conditions and morale for staff.

This is an exciting new start for everyone involved. The new Agency will not carry passengers, since bonuses depend on all workers delivering productivity and efficiency. This agreement delivers on a specific GSD Manifesto commitment to Government housing tenants.”