



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
MINISTRY OF EQUALITY, SOCIAL SERVICES & THE ELDERLY
14 GOVERNOR'S PARADE
GIBRALTAR

PRESS RELEASE

No: 84/2014

Date: 20th February 2014

OPPOSITION SCAREMONGERING OVER SOCIAL SERVICES POSTS

The Opposition has once again tried its hand at scaremongering and distorting of facts by claiming that Social Services are down by eight members of staff. This is simply not the case and the Opposition would be more responsible in discharging its duties if, at the very least, it attempted to seek clarification from the relevant minister before spreading misinformation.

In their campaign to scaremonger, the GSD do not mention that the complement for social services has increased under this administration. In addition, we have also added the post of social worker assistant and additional administrative support. By expanding this crucial service we are obviously creating 'vacancies' until these new posts are filled!

While there have been a number of other vacancies at social services recently, most of these have been covered, either by people acting up or by roles being filled on temporary contracts until permanent replacements are found. A new social worker will start work in 2 weeks' time so there are only 2 vacancies and the recruitment process for these posts is already well under way. The post of teacher referred to by Mrs Ellul-Hammond was a part time post and, in a review of the service, this role is now being covered in a different, more efficient, way.

It must be remembered that there has been a long-term shortage of social workers in Gibraltar as there has been little or no motivation for local people to train in this field. As a result, recruitment has historically (including during the time of the GSD) been undertaken in the UK. Such a policy brings its own issues when successful applicants take some time to settle down and adjust to our customs whilst others do not settle in at all and wish to return to the UK.

When the current vacancies arose, the Care Agency engaged the recruitment process that had previously been in place, ie the advertising of the position in UK journals (at great expense). Management was not satisfied with this process which yielded a large number of unsuitable applicants. In order for the recruitment process to be more fruitful and better value for money, the Care Agency then engaged the services of a dedicated recruitment agency to work alongside the vacancies advertised locally. This new recruitment process is almost complete and shows that it is more successful in weeding out the unsuitable applicants.

The GSD need to be reminded that social services never operated on a full complement when they were in Government. The new focused and targeted recruitment process is being done in parallel to a professional development strategy for local graduates which was introduced by this administration last year. The Care Agency now has 4 graduates in Social Services but these individuals are working as Social Worker Trainees in a supported environment. These posts are over and above the social worker complement until the Trainees have the sufficient experience to apply for jobs as social workers. It must be noted that previously, these individuals would have been placed straight into social worker posts, notwithstanding the fact that they had no experience. This is clearly a case of double standards by the GSD because, crucially, if today's administration was operating under the GSD standards, there would actually be no vacancies as posts would have been filled by inexperienced graduates! Instead, what we are doing is recruiting experienced social workers so that trainees can work alongside them.

Commenting on the matter Minister with responsibility for Social Services Samantha Sacramento stated that "Isobel Ellul-Hammond should stop pontificating or has she already forgotten the little support that the GSD offered to the Social Services in the past? It is true that social workers are under immense pressure - this is always the case because of the front line job that they discharge, especially those who work in the children and families team because of the reactive nature of the job that they do. I am proud of the professionals who work in social services and acknowledge that they act as true professionals. I meet regularly with the individual teams so that together we can work on improving this vital service. It is also essential that we use the most efficient recruitment procedures to ensure that we get the best people for this important job"