

SMART RECRUITMENT COMMENT ON REGENERATION AND RECRUITMENT IN POOLE, DORSET

The thousands of job opportunities currently being created by new housing and business ventures in Poole and the promise of more employment generated by the new bridge and its associated development, needs to be carefully planned for.

That's the view of recruitment specialist Helen Stacey, a director of Dorset and Somerset based Smart Recruitment, who have an office in Poole and are at the forefront of supplying staff for a wide cross-section of local industries.

At the moment Helen says there is an acute shortage of workers such as CNC turners, millers, welders, PCB assemblers and all sections of the construction industry from general labourers to skilled carpenters, brick layers, plumbers and electricians.

With this already a problem for existing new and refurbishment contracts, Helen says the situation will only get worse when the proposed new build at Hamworthy gets underway.

And one of the key reasons is the lack of affordable housing - something which is depriving local companies of local labour.

With unemployment rates across the south west currently running at 1.5 per cent, the lowest for 30 years, she says it has become increasingly difficult to find both skilled and unskilled labour within Dorset to meet the economic expansion.

Because the region has one of the highest property values in the country and temporary pay rates for industrial staff currently running at between £5.50p and £6 an hour, many people cannot afford to work and live in and around the Bournemouth and Poole conurbation.

"It has reached such a level that it is now economically viable for temporary staff, particularly blue collar workers who can earn in excess £9 an hour plus overtime, to fly into Bournemouth airport from the North of England and even Scotland, to work here during the week and then go home at weekends.

"We have been making just such arrangements on behalf of employers with their workers living in bed and breakfast accommodation," explained Helen.

The knock-on effect for the local economy is that much of the income generated through wages isn't being spent on items such as consumer durables within Dorset, but is going outside the area.

To fill the skills gap local companies are also having to take workers from the former Eastern European countries who, as migrant workers, bring their skills but then send their money home rather than spend it locally.

Smart Recruitment, which has offices in Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch, Yeovil and Dorchester already sources a third of its temporary workers for manufacturing industries from the new EU Eastern European countries and has employed a Polish speaking member of its own staff to cope with the demand.

With government statistics showing that the number of immigrant workers in the UK has increased by 50 per cent in the last four years Helen foresees the number of foreign workers only increasing still further unless there is a way of finding staff locally.

"Whatever happens with the developments associated with the bridge there must be affordable housing otherwise Poole just won't have the people to do the jobs."

Another important area, Helen says, where Dorset needs to plan for the future is in the way young people approach employment opportunities and their attitude, especially in the service industries.

"It appears that young people don't seem to have the right attitude and life skills when it comes to dealing with people. There are a lot of job opportunities in catering with the number of bars and restaurants being opened in Poole but not the people to serve in them."

Helen also believes there needs to be a refocusing on training and career directions.

"Young people are being attracted to the sexier careers such as the media and IT but with the skills shortage, wage rates in industries such as construction have been going up and there are now good prospects and good money to be made, especially with the anticipated skills demanded for the regeneration."

To help fulfil this need Smart Recruitment is currently developing a sponsored programme with the construction department at Bournemouth and Poole College.

And as well as young people this will provide opportunities for older people to retrain and change careers.

Filling vacancies will in future also rely on employers re-introducing apprenticeships, something which many of the larger companies in the region are already having to consider, according to Helen.

"We have a skilled workforce that is getting older all the time with no one coming in at the bottom, as these people retire there is going to be a gap that needs to be filled, otherwise the situation will only get worse."

To make the most of the opportunities provided by the new bridge, Helen observes that there also needs to be investment in the surrounding road network.

"Because there are so many job opportunities, people are able to pick and choose where they work. If the new bridge doesn't cure the problem of congestion in Poole, people will simply choose not to work there because they have other choices."

Smart Group Recruitment Solutions service a catchment area which encompasses all corners of Dorset. The company has a network of five branches, four in Dorset and one in Yeovil, and currently employs more than 50 staff.

The Smart service is broad covering a diverse range of products, services and industries. Candidates and clients benefit from the company's branch network which is technology driven through the Smart database; this links to every desk in every branch, providing instant access for candidate skill matching, availability and positions available.

For further information on any of the services provided by Smart Recruitment call 01202 629000 or visit www.smartgroup.co.uk to find your local branch in Poole, Bournemouth, Dorchester, Christchurch or Yeovil.

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Caption: - Helen Stacey of Smart Recruitment which has five branches across the south coast.



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