

2.5 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the tendering and selection process for the new Jersey Tourism website:

Would the Minister advise Members of the tendering and selection process adopted for the £250,000 contract for the new Jersey Tourism website and indicate whether this covers ongoing site maintenance?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Economic Development):

I hope Members will forgive me if I sway a little. I am only on one leg at the moment. I am very confident that a robust process was followed in awarding this contract and that the Island will benefit from a new, well-designed website that enables us to compete in the global market place. The tender for Jersey.com followed all guidelines laid down in financial direction at 5.7. Seven companies invited to tender; 3 local, 4 from the United Kingdom. Two of the local suppliers decided to join forces and produce one reply to the tender. Of the 7 short-listed, there was a matrix criterion with a weighted average for importance to different elements of the project and each tender was scored against this matrix. The top 2 scoring tenders were invited to give a presentation to a panel made up of the Chief Executive of Economic Development, E.D. (Economic Development) officials and the Chairman of the Tourism Development Fund. The short list consisted of one U.K. and the 2 local companies that had teamed jointly together. Following presentations, a recommendation paper was given to members of the T.D.F. (Tourism Development Fund) for consideration. The paper and support documents were discussed and a unanimous decision was made by the T.D.F. to me as Minister. The £250,000 will not include maintenance, this is covered by the Economic Development operational budget. The global change in consumer purchasing habits means a state-of-the-art website is a must. Of all international travel, 43 per cent will be purchased online this year. If Jersey is to compete for its share of tourism, an outstanding web presence is essential. The new site will be completely customer focussed and I expect that it will increase substantially a conversion and increase visitor spending.

2.5.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In the documentation, the Minister refers to a significant 19 per cent increases in the total sales year on year between 2007 and 2006 but the total sales achieved by this website amount to a mere £250,000. Does he really believe that spending £250,000 to get the £250,000 is value for money?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think it is important for me to explain that there are 2 elements that I think the Deputy needs some assistance with. There is the actual website which is Marketing Jersey and there is the actual booking engine which is combined, all the hotels in Jersey are linked into the booking system and the figures that he is talking about is in fact the amount of money that is the direct sales that engine drives and so the website is consisting of 2 things. It is a showcase for Jersey and there is a separate booking engine. From that Jersey.com website, members of the public - travellers - may well be booking on all sorts of different sites; Expedia, Flybe, B.A., all sorts of other sites. There are 2 separate issues there. What is important is that figure of 43 per cent of international travel now booked online. That is why we need a strong Jersey.com website presence and an integrating travel booking system which is what we both now have.

2.5.2 Deputy P.V.F Le Claire:

The Minister said that the £250,000 cost of the website which he has defended as being necessary for keeping up to date with modern tourism is not inclusive of operational costs which are borne out by the department in relation to their annual expenditure. Could I ask what are the anticipated maintenance costs of these websites and these systems for this year and the years in the future?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Economic Development is part now of the corporate I.T. system which is under the Chief Minister's Department. We get excellent I.T. support from the essential service of Computer

Services and it is all basically rolled into that but we have individual people based at Tourism in order to run the website. The most important thing is this new website is going to mean that we are going to be able to put content on and change the website in a much more up to date manner than we have. We are going to be able to control the D.N.A. (deoxyribonucleic acid) of this website in a way that we have never done so before, so not only are we going to be spending much more time with our own people putting on content but also the operational aspects of it; the actual way the website works will be run by the Computer Services Department. If the Deputy is interested in knowing those specific costs, I can certainly give him those. They are certainly within the budgets that we have available.

2.5.3 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

It does seem strange that one would take on board a way of consulting that extends to 7 companies, spending £250,000 developing a website and not know what the maintenance costs of that website will be once it is operational. Then, to tell us that there are people in the States of Jersey that are going to be able to add content and are going to be able to work within that content to update it, basically tells me, from my knowledge of websites, they are going to be fully conversant with what they are being given and not to have taken into account and not to know how much it is going to cost to continue to fund. This does seem to be rather disappointing. I wonder if the Minister might get back to us as to what the actual expenditure will be, please.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The fact is the £250,000 is for designing a website and that is the whole content management system and once that overall machine is in place, you then put on all the additional content - and that is the important thing to keep live, to keep up to date, special offers, the latest advertising material that we are putting forward. That is the content provided, but it is absolutely vital that we have the website engine to do that and that is the £250,000 together with the overall structure of the website interface with the consumer. It is the additional content that will be added from the Tourism Department together with our marketing advisors and it is the Chief Minister's Department and the Computer Services Department that will run it. There are 3 different disciplines there, all being joined into one; moreover, it is the existing budget of the operational costs which are already budgeted for and if he wants those figures, I am happy to give to them to him.

2.5.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Would the Minister not acknowledge that in terms of the remit of his department in other areas such as the development of a strong, local I.T. base, it would have been better had he encouraged local suppliers, for example, to develop alliances with U.K. based suppliers in order that the skills were developed in co-operation and strengthened on-Island?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am no less a supporter of local businesses and I want to see... and indeed, the Showcase Awards for Enterprise showed what expertise we have in Jersey. I would have loved this tender to go a local organisation and indeed, I explained in my answer that a local organisation was on the short-list. At the end of the day, we have to take professional advice and I have to take the advice of the T.D.F. and they believed that the U.K. company in this case was the best person and the best organisation to deliver that website. That does not mean to say... and that is not in any way critical of the local capability. We are working as hard as we can with local organisations to raise their competencies, get further and... indeed, of all of the people, the Chairman of the T.D.F. is a member of the Chamber of Commerce and I am sure that he thought very hard when he had to make that decision which was in the best interests of the Island.

2.5.5 Deputy S.C. Ferguson of St. Brelade:

Is this new website going to include a facility for booking one ticket to go to various local attractions just as you can for trips to London because that is an important part of the tourism brief although I understand that Elizabeth Castle will not be open until the beginning of June.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Deputy is absolutely right and indeed, Deputy Southern, in his question earlier in respect of the amount of money that we are putting through the website... up, by the way, 26 per cent on 2007 in January to February figures up to 144, that is just for the moment on tourism bed nights. There are some 4,200 bed nights booked on the website. I know it is small in overall terms but what we want is a booking engine which my very good friend, the Assistant Minister for Education, Sport and Culture and I are trying to achieve; an integrated booking system which is now well under way that not only can you book your hotel room but you can book your visitor attraction and you can book your flight. A whole integrated booking engine is what we are trying to achieve.

The Bailiff:

There are a number of Members who wish to ask supplementary questions and we will close soon but may I encourage the Minister please, to be succinct in his replies?

2.5.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

Could the Minister inform the House if this was the cheapest tender, the highest tender or where did it range in around the tenders? Thank you, Sir.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The tender was for £250,000 worth of budget.

2.5.7 Deputy P.V.F. Le Claire:

Would the Economic Development Minister undertake to assess how much money is being spent States-wide on the development and maintenance of websites within the States' budget together with, perhaps, the Chairman of the P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) to identify whether or not the States is not running simultaneously budgets that could not be contained within the States themselves? It does seem, on the surface, many websites have been developed, updated and refined and perhaps we might need some uniformity in relation to the expenditure and manufacture of these systems.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think that is an answer properly directed to the Chief Minister, if I may say, but Corporate I.T. (Information Technology) is changing the way we are dealing with content management for a variety of different websites across the States and efficiencies as part of the £20 million of efficiency savings are being delivered already. But, that is a question properly directed to the Chief Minister's Department.