

3.11 Deputy M.R. Higgins of the Minister for Economic Development regarding the contract with NATS Ltd (the UK privatised air traffic control services provider formerly known as the National Air Traffic Services Ltd.).

Does the Minister believe that Jersey Airport is getting value for money from its contract with NATS Limited (the U.K. privatised air traffic control services provider formerly known as the National Air Traffic Services Limited)?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean (The Minister for Economic Development):

If I may I would like to ask my Assistant Minister who has responsibility for the ports, Senator Routier, to answer the question.

Senator P.F. Routier (Assistant Minister for Economic Development - rapporteur):

I am pleased to have the opportunity to answer this question. As already provided in a written response, Jersey Airport established a 5-year contract with NATS to provide a suitably qualified manager to manage air traffic control operations and with the necessary knowledge and skills to oversee the transition into the new air traffic control facility. Although the new air traffic control facility is now operational, we are still within a period of transition and during this time NATS continues to provide the necessary skills and support under its contractual obligations and its obligations under the control to supply the A.T.C. (Air Traffic Control) systems. Although the exact commercial nature of the contract with NATS will remain confidential as we are not legally allowed to publicly disclose it, I do believe we are getting good value for money from the service provider and will continue to do so until the contract expires in October 2012.

3.11.1 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

I find it very surprising about the confidential nature of the contract. Is the Assistant Minister telling us we are not allowed to know the value of the contract, which is part of my written question and which was not answered? Secondly, does he feel they are getting value for money from the contract when we have been told that this individual, for example, is well qualified to bring in the new air traffic control system and does not have a radar qualification, and appears to have overruled the recommendations of the Jersey Air Traffic Controllers regarding the electronic flight process system which currently is not working terribly well and which they have filed a number of mandatory occurrence reports at the Civil Aviation Authority?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The value of the contract is confidential. The contract is legally binding for that to remain confidential. I have to say that the Deputy has just asked a question identifying a particular member of staff, a particular individual and every Member has a right to ask questions and I would ask the Deputy really to consider the consequences of asking personal questions.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Well, could the Assistant Minister answer the rest of it then in that case about the quality and whether we are getting value for money when controllers have recommended a system which has been overruled by someone who has less qualifications that they do in certain areas?

Senator P.F. Routier:

The Deputy is being fed a lot of information from people within the Air Traffic Control Department and I am afraid he is being misguided in many, many ways. I have to say that the system which has been put into place has been negotiated and the existing air traffic controllers were involved in helping to formulate the system and a lot of what they suggested was taken into consideration when the final system was put in place. The system is up and running, it is functional, it is operational, it is safe and the controllers are getting used to it. They are in a transition position at the present time and they are getting used to the system. I can assure Members that having been to the tower on a number of occasions and watched the operators using it they are getting used to it and eventually everything will be fine.

3.11.2 Senator T.J. Le Main:

Can the Assistant Minister explain why NATS U.K. Limited were appointed as the sole supplier of systems in the new tower and why other service providers were not given the chance to tender and were therefore excluded?

Senator P.F. Routier:

It is not right that other people were not given the opportunity to tender. There was certainly an open process with regard to getting the system into place, the contract into place, and I believe we went through the right process.

Senator T.J. Le Main:

Would the Assistant Minister put that in writing to me so that I can confirm the information I received that what he is saying is not correct?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, if I may say so it is now going to be in writing because it will be on Hansard and you will be able to use that reply.

3.11.3 The Deputy of St. John:

I was hoping that we would have had the Minister to answer this but here we go again, he passed it on to somebody who has not been elected by this Chamber. Has the Minister got full confidence in the Jersey Airport Director of Operations, and it is claimed that she instructed A.T.C. staff not to make negative comments re the new system when the Minister made a visit recently?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As I said earlier, I am not prepared to talk about individual members of staff. I do not think it is appropriate for this Chamber to identify particular individuals in this way and I will not answer that question.

The Deputy of St. John:

Will the Minister answer if he has confidence in that member of staff?

The Deputy Bailiff:

He has indicated that he is not prepared to answer the question you put to him.

3.11.4 The Deputy of St. Martin:

With reference to value for money, is the Minister able to confirm whether there is an ongoing annual service charge of £100,000 and if the answer is in the affirmative was

the charge part of the original contract or was it to upgrade the shortcomings that have arisen?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I am not sure what £100,000 the Deputy is talking about. There is an ongoing amount of £100,000 within our budget every year which is a continual upgrading of the system, as it has been for many, many years. Every system does need to be continually maintained and that has been there for a long time and will continue to be there.

[16:00]

The Deputy of St. Martin:

Can I just get clarification? Will that ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Deputy, we are moving ahead.

3.11.5 Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier:

Would the Assistant Minister confirm that all the tenderers were asked as to their attitude to general aviation and would he confirm that NATS was seen as an organisation that was very supportive and sympathetic to the needs of general as well commercial aviation?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I honestly cannot answer that question at the present time. I will have to check that out exactly, but I will get back to the Deputy with that information.

3.11.6 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Was it part of the NATS contract to advise on the new equipment and who decided not to work with Guernsey when deciding on the new equipment?

Senator P.F. Routier:

As regards to working with Guernsey, I am not sure that for this particular contract regarding the tower there was any desire to work with Guernsey. There has been a piece of work done with regard to secondary and primary radar systems which we have been having a lot of contact with Guernsey about. But their budgeting cycle is different to ours and they were unable to meet the timing of our requirements to have the radar in place in time for the C.I.C.Z. (Channel Island Control Zone) requirements which required our radar to be replaced sooner rather than theirs but we have managed to establish with Guernsey that the maintenance and ongoing spares ... because they are going out to tender soon for their radar, it is hoped that they will purchase the similar radar to ours and we will be able to share maintenance agreements with them. I am sorry, you will have to remind me of the first part of the question.

Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Was it part of the NATS contract to advise on the new equipment?

Senator P.F. Routier:

Yes, it was.

3.11.7 Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Will the Assistant Minister, and this is on the view of whether we are getting value for money with the contract, investigate a very serious, in fact alarming, allegation that has been made to me, and I am not saying there is any truth in this because I would like him to investigate to determine whether it is true, that there was the purchase of an older signalling lamp for the air traffic control tower which cost £900 but was invoiced at £6,000 and, secondly, that the lamp that was supplied was not supplied with the red and green filters which are necessary for signalling and also there were not sufficient plugs in the tower that it could be plugged into and a cable is now going down, I believe, into the stairwell?

Senator P.F. Routier:

I have no knowledge of this particular item. I would suggest to the Deputy if he has items like this that it would be far better than in a public forum like this, where he himself even admits that he does not have ... whether it is right or wrong, to make a suggestion along those lines. I will look at it certainly, but I would suggest to the Deputy in future that if he has any comments like that that he does bring them to me and I will investigate them surely. I would just ask, finally, to Members if they ... I hope they are going to take up the opportunity to come and look at the tower, which has been offered to every Member in August and they will see for themselves that what we have is a state of the art tower which is working exceptionally well and they will see for themselves that everything is safe and sound.

Deputy M.R. Higgins:

Could I just quickly ask whether the air traffic controllers will be allowed to speak to us and answer our questions honestly?

The Deputy Bailiff:

You will be able to find out when you attend, no doubt, Deputy.