

2.12 Senator S.C. Ferguson of the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the employment of a public relations contractor by his Department:

Is the Treasury tendering for its own public relations contractor and if so, why, when there is already a States Communications Department?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf (The Minister for Treasury and Resources):

The answer to that is yes. The Treasury mainly uses the States Communications Unit and values, like many other departments, the work that they do. However, just as a number of other departments have, Treasury has a number of peaks and troughs of workflow, which means that external resources are sometimes needed to supplement the skills and the time that the Communications Unit have available for us. The Treasury aims to be as open and transparent and accessible as possible. Communication support is needed to support these objectives, particularly with the use of the States website, which is often a more cost effective way of communicating than, for example, buying in expensive advertising. I am sure, as Members will have noticed, the website for Treasury has improved substantially in recent months. More information on tax, pensions and other matters is now available to Islanders directly so that they have access in order to manage their own affairs. In recent months, the Treasury has also published some of the most comprehensive set of reports; for example the M.T.F.P. (Medium Term Financial Plan) and it has also communicated this in a number of different areas. We have also issued and communicated a 6-monthly report and we are also making huge changes in areas such as online filing for the Income Tax Department. Effective communication is part of the changes that are in place at the Treasury and they are designed to save money, but also to deliver a better standard of service to Islanders increasing transparency and improving the level of communication with States Members and, of course, the public, so supplementing the Communications Department and their excellent work is part of that process.

2.12.1 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

In the tender document most of the requirements are looking at internal communication, a departmental profile of the Minister for Treasury and Resources and the Treasurer's external engagements. That is for the local people, for the internal department, a departmental profile of the authorities' departments and employee achievements. There is a whole long list of them. Does the Minister for Treasury honestly think that he needs a communications contractor for the work that is being done to advertise the work of the Treasury within the States system?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I would have thought that Senator Ferguson would want us to communicate what the Treasury is doing and what the Treasury is trying to achieve within Departments. She and I, I think, would be as one in wanting to celebrate, identify ways that the States is saving money, to celebrate success, to say how good practice has been found in some Departments and to explain how other departments can work with that. Also, assisting the Chief Minister in what he is doing and his department is doing, is building better teamwork within the States of Jersey. That is what this is about and this is about delivering value for money in the £650 million per year that we spend and I, as Minister for Treasury and Resources, have to account for to a large extent in terms of the way it is spent.

2.12.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

The Ministry for Treasury and Resources has not answered because in effect he should perhaps look at what Scrutiny does, which is use our internal staff who have a much better idea of what is going on and how to communicate it. Does the Minister for Treasury and Resources not realise that having a Communications Services contractor looks very much like spinning to the world in general?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

This use of the word “spin” is extremely interesting. Many people would say that many faith texts, many great works of art and many things in life are spun. I do not quite understand this word “spin”. We are in the business of explaining complex information, complex issues simply and sometimes my Treasury staff and I are not very good at doing it in plain English. Sometimes we are so engrossed in the detail we need to raise it up and to put it into plain English like very much the details that we are publishing today in relation to corporate tax, trying to distil it into ways that people can understand and then make their own minds up about it. It is not about spinning; it is about being transparent and about communicating and that is what I am elected to do. That is how I am trying to improve communication within the Treasury and, frankly, if Senator Ferguson does not like it, then she has got the wrong Minister for Treasury and Resources.

2.12.3 Deputy G.C.L. Baudains:

I am always interested by the word “transparency” because I can usually see through most things. What I do not understand here is that the Minister for Treasury and Resources, who usually seems eager to advise most people on a wide range of issues, cannot now do his own communication which he has effectively been doing in the past by himself.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Some would say that I have not been doing my communication very well with some of the difficulties I have had in recent months. Perhaps, I should have communicated more directly and when I re-stood for the position of Minister for Treasury and Resources, I said that I was going to communicate more. I said that I would spend more time with Members. We would spend, with my Assistant Minister, more time with Members explaining issues, explaining some of the technical issues. We are trying to do that across the States Department. Some of the decisions that we are making, some of the things that we have had to ask States Department to do are very difficult and we want to be better at it and we want to be more transparent and we want to be more open. We need some help to do that and the Communications Unit do a great job in relation to assisting us but I am not the only department in relation to having some external assistance in terms of communication and that is what we are doing.

2.12.4 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Just to repeat, Deputy, would the Minister not acknowledge that he is in fact the greatest public relation officer for his own department and that this is totally superfluous to employ other people to do the job?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am grateful for the comment and for the compliment, if there was one, but I have only got so many hours in one day. I put in the work, certainly and I do try and communicate but the Treasury is a big department and we have many different areas which we are responsible for. I take one example, this is to do with the marginal rate of tax, the simple arrangement where the marginal rate gives people effectively lower tax than paying at 20 per cent. Have we got that message across? Have we explained it very well? No, we have not in the past. I encourage Deputy Le Hérissier to look at the website and the plain English explanation for that and the plain English examples that are now going to every taxpayer in Jersey to make them understand, to allow them to understand that our system is allowing them to pay less tax. I cannot do it all. I am grateful for the compliment. We do need help and communication. Sometimes people say it is 20 per cent substance and 80 per cent communication and perhaps we have not been working hard enough on the communication. Certainly, when I read the editorial of the *J.E.P. (Jersey Evening Post)* sometimes, I realise I have got to do some more communicating and some explanation because they do not get it.

2.12.5 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In between all that communication there was a little bit of information, especially that his department is not the only one that is using extra communicators to get the message out there. Could the Minister - and he might not have the figures now - also let us know the Communications Unit, which was the States Communications Unit, who now service only the 10 ministries, what the budget was and the extra budgets that are now being used by the 10 departments because I can assure the Minister, the Scrutiny budget for communications is probably miniscule in comparison and probably just as efficient.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

All departments will be using communication on different things. She is an Assistant Minister of the Health Department, on the debate that we are having today, and she knows just how much work went into creating those documents so that we could explain to the public the changes that the department faced. Economic Development will be using all sorts of people to explain their message in relation to what they are doing in terms of inward investment. We need to win hearts and minds, both here and outside of the Island, on various different issues. Communication is not a sin. It is not a crime. It is an expert area. Just as we have accountants and lawyers, you have people that understand how to frame complex things in plain English. It is not a bad thing.

The Deputy Bailiff:

The Minister should be quick.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Okay, well maybe it should be quick but there has been a lot about communication and it is not a bad thing and we are being open about it.

2.12.6 Deputy J.A. Martin:

In communication creep then, can the Minister tell us the budget extension because he is now telling us there are more people doing it? Yes there are communications, it was the States communications. That part of it I fully understand. Who are these extra people? Are they on contract or are they being employed per communication?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I will try and look at that and but just as the print contract, it is quite difficult sometimes to put your finger on whether or not people are being brought in to teach our own staff how to communicate better. So you cannot just segregate these people out. Sometimes it is about education and that is certainly what we are trying to do in Treasury. Treasury are experts at what they do but Treasury do need to learn how to explain things better, as I think I have just illustrated.

2.12.7 Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré of St. Lawrence:

I will pursue the theme. Just to ask the direct question, for Treasury what is the ball park figure for this tender? If the Minister is not aware of it could he inform us later?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I think in all terms of the communication in areas, like the way that the M.T.F.P. folder was put together, that is all formatting. That is all communication. I think we spent £44,000 on total external communications this year and that is in relation to all the things that we have been doing. I think that is pretty good value for money.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

Is that the tender?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

No, that is what we have spent so far. The tender is being run by Procurement. I have nothing to do with it. It is handled entirely by my own departmental officials for a lot of internal reasons, as the Senator rightly said.

Deputy J.A.N. Le Fondré:

What is the budget?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I would need notice of that. I am not aware personally. I have not signed that off. I think it is about £50,000 to £60,000 a year. I will correct that.

2.12.8 Deputy M. Tadier:

The Minister suggested that he did not understand the term “spin”, which I think is generally understood to mean a certain bias or interpretation. It would get the public, in this context to do with policy, to have a favourable interpretation of that policy and often involves the expression “to win hearts and minds”. Does the Minister accept that it is perhaps slightly unkind and dismissive to say simply... he used the example of the *J.E.P.* not getting it? Does he agree that it is entirely possible for the *J.E.P.* or anybody else to fully understand what the Minister is saying, and the policies coming out of Treasury and Resources but simply not to agree with them and to have different opinion? Does the Minister agree that in our democratic society it is perfectly valid for somebody not to agree with the Minister for Treasury and Resources but also to 100 per cent get it at the same time?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Absolutely, that is democracy and the Deputy and I will agree on some things and we will not agree on others. But headlines are certainly “spin”. Sometimes we all have difficulties that the headline gives you the impression of something and you read the article and you say: “Absolutely that is completely correct.” The difficulty with media now is that there is “news”, which is apparently factual information, and there is “comment”. Comment is not news and some of that is spin. So we need to be clear when something says “comment” on the top of the *J.E.P.* It is an opinion. It is not news. We all need to understand the fact that this is an increasingly difficult world in terms of information and what we need to be doing is communicating directly with people. That is what we and the Treasury are trying to do.

Deputy M. Tadier:

A supplementary, Sir?

The Deputy Bailiff:

No, thank you. We have already spent 13 minutes on this question. We have had quite enough communication on it. Senator Ferguson.

2.12.9 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

A very simple communication, Sir. We think that it is going to cost something in the order of £50,000 to £60,000 per year to do things such as weekly business meetings, fortnightly meetings with the Minister and the production of written presentations for all media including TV, radio and other electronic forms of media, such as Twitter. Is this really value for money? Scrutiny does its own media communication.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

If the Senator wants another Minister for Treasury and Resources to do things differently then she will have to change this Minister for Treasury and Resources. I am committed to communicating. I want to save money on the buying in of outside media because it is expensive and I think we should be communicating better, directly with people using social media. Yes,

Twitter - much twittered and regarded negatively by some - is an important way of communicating and we will use it.