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3.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding the return of Avios points obtained by civil servants when flying on States business:

Can civil servants obtain personal Avios points when flying specifically on States business and, if so, what action, if any, does the Chief Minister propose to take to ensure that, in future, any such points are returned to the States?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

Public sector staff can currently earn Avios points when flying on States business, however Financial Directions make it clear that officers must not select more expensive flights or travel with a specific carrier to receive benefits. Avios terms and conditions state that companies are not eligible to be account holders therefore Avios points cannot be returned to the States. The current review of States travel policies is looking at loyalty points. Its findings will determine how loyalty points will be managed in the future.

3.7.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Does the Chief Minister envisage that it would be a good way forward to start saying that the situation where these people can obtain personal Avios points should be ended as a matter of practice and that for the benefit of the public all Avios points obtained for flights, which are booked on States business, should be retained by the States in the interests of getting good value for money for the taxpayer?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The Deputy obviously was not listening when I replied to his first question. It is not possible for corporates to have Avios points. The States do have points where it is possible, like B.A. (British Airways) points. What I personally envisage from the review is that we would develop a policy similar to the policy in the United Kingdom, issued by Treasury, whereby Avios points are used to offset the future costs of travel for that individual because it is related to individuals and cannot be transferred to a State thereby benefiting the taxpayer. Of course Avios points do also allow staff and Ministers to take advantage when they have got to a set number of points to access various reduced fares and lounges, again benefiting the taxpayer by reducing the cost.

3.7.2 Deputy S.M. Wickenden of St. Helier:

In Financial Directions on travel and accommodation, in section 2.1.10, it talks about travel points and it says that: "Departments must ensure that procedures appropriate to the extent of travel undertaken are in place for capturing any benefit procured to staff from States travel." Can the Minister let us know if his department has a register of such things?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I do not have the information to that detail but what I do know is that B.A. points and other points of a similar nature are collected by the States and are already used when those flights or accommodations are being booked through the booking system and are automatically accrued to the States where they can, and then used to offset future costs of travel.

3.7.3 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

The Chief Minister will know that the points are duplicated on the corporate card as well. The States currently has 1.5 million points, the equivalent of 200 flights to London. There has been no redemption on these points since July last year. Does he think that is best use of public money? He

said that this would reduce the cost of travel yet redemption is not occurring. So is the policy working?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

That is why we are reviewing the policy, to make sure that it does work and to make sure that points that are being collected are being redeemed appropriately during any given year. I think that some departments are redeeming those points to offset the costs of future travel and accommodation and others are not. What we need to make sure is that it is centrally organised. The Vice-Chair of P.A.C. (Public Accounts Committee) is shaking his head as though that is not the case. The Chairman of P.A.C. is correct. My understanding is that points have not been redeemed since the date he said but certainly some departments in the past have been doing so and we need to make sure that they are managed and controlled centrally to make sure that those points are being redeemed for reduced cost to taxpayers. But the points are not being lost in not being redeemed.

3.7.4 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

We have a central group travel policy therefore they should be being redeemed centrally. So why are departments redeeming them independently and not centrally? This is all about central procurement and that is what the travel portal is for. Yet departments seem to be doing it independently. Why is that?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I know that the Deputy has been in to look at the centralised system. He knows that the points are collected centrally but he also knows that of course individual departments currently book flights and accommodation for members of their department and for Ministers, and that is where some of them are redeeming and some are not. The whole purpose of the review is to make sure that all departments are operating in the same way and that we are redeeming to offset costs where it is best value to the taxpayer. If you take, for example, some of these points, you can get better value by offsetting a limited number of points to save £200 than you might by booking the entire flight or accommodation on those points. It is that detail that needs to be reviewed and we need to develop a policy on so that we are getting absolute best value for the loyalty points that are being accrued.

3.7.5 Deputy M. Tadier:

It seems like we are arguing about angels on pinheads when one sees this in the wider context of voluntary/compulsory redundancies, outsourcing, privatisation and nursery cuts, health charges and the stealth taxes that are coming forward. Does the Chief Minister not agree that this is a damning indictment on the competence of his Council of Ministers and that many of the public see the Council of Ministers as a complete shambles because at the same time that they are making these pernicious cuts they cannot even keep a civil service at the higher end, which are completely out of control, which are not only going on business class trips with their golf clubs, *et cetera*, which is against States policy, but they are ...

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

I am coming to the question.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Please sit down if I am speaking. It is very important that questions are concise; Standing Orders require that. I allow a fair amount of lenience when people want to formulate and preface their questions but I would be grateful if you could now just ask the question.

Deputy M. Tadier:

The question about competence, does the Chief Minister agree that the whole competence of the Council of Ministers is at question and that there is a wide perception, which I think is true, that the top echelons of the civil service are out of control, and this is, if not dishonest, it is a very strange and devious way of going about things?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Deputy, you are not making an allegation that members of the civil service are either dishonest or devious, are you?

Deputy M. Tadier:

No, but I am saying that the retention of Avios points by top civil servants and the fact that we apparently appear to be oblivious to it or indifferent towards it is very worrying.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is difficult to know where to start with a rambling question like that. The review is underway. I expect that that review will put in place new policies to deal with all the issues about cost of flights, cost of accommodation, use of loyalty points, in a way that gives better value to all taxpayers. I also expect, as we are doing reviewing all expenditure in the public sector, we will in due course see a reducing cost in these particular areas. But let us not forget that our staff are flying around the world. What we need to make sure is that they are getting the lowest possible fare, whether they are travelling economy or whether they are travelling business. Because what they are doing is helping to create jobs in our community and deliver many millions of pounds of inward investment into our community which the 3 Members **[Approbation]** - over the Assembly - do not seem to appreciate. They would rather that these people were out of work. That we had a declining number of employees **[Interruption]** ... that we did not have people investing in our economy.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can I remind Members that when the Chair is speaking nobody else stands.

[10:30]

Now that goes for you, Chief Minister. I was speaking. That goes for the Members opposite. Chief Minister, you have reached the end of the time which you can deliver that question. The question really should be directed or the answer should be directed to answering the question and not necessarily a speech of beliefs that you think that other Members may hold but I think that is the only intervention that I wish to make at this point. I have time for one more question plus the final supplementary so Deputy of St. John.

3.7.6 The Deputy of St. John:

The Chief Minister used Financial Directions to support one of his answers. Could he explain how the Human Resources Policy works in conjunction with the Financial Directions and whether we are contractually obliged to allow these points to senior civil servants?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I am not sure that we are contractually obliged to allow senior civil servants or Ministers to achieve loyalty points but it would be cutting off our nose to spite our face if we did not because by the use of loyalty points when one goes up tiers it means that we can get special deals, reduced cost for flights, for accommodation, by having those loyalty points. The challenge is, as the questioner has suggested, that those Avios points ... other loyalty points can be given to companies and we collect those and we need to make sure they are being redeemed. Avios points cannot be so what we need to make sure is that those individual Avios which accrue to the individual are used to offset future travel costs to benefit the taxpayer and that is what needs to change.

3.7.7 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

The former adviser to the Government who produced a report in which he said that the top levels of the civil service had a culture which was resistant to change I think made a point here that demonstrates that we are talking about, with the perceived abuse of how business class flights have been used in the States is a symptom of that. Does the Chief Minister agree with me that simply introducing a new system around this very specific problem, which is a symptom of the problem, not the problem itself, would he agree that more attention would be better placed looking at trying to change the culture at the top level of the civil service so that we are not in these situations on future occasions?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

The problem is that we need to make sure that we get the lowest cost available flight whether officers or Ministers are travelling economy class or business class and we are giving the best value to the taxpayer. I do not think it is the culture and we need to make sure that we have got appropriate Financial Directions that work together and regulations in place to ensure that we are doing just that because the benefits ultimately of engaging with the world are what we are trying to achieve.