

5.8 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture regarding the justification for travel and accommodation expenses incurred by civil servants watching rugby matches:

Given that just under £6,000 has been spent by the department since August 2012 on travel and accommodation expenses for civil servants to watch rugby matches, will the Minister advise what the justification was for such expenditure?

Senator L.J. Farnham (The Minister for Economic Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture):

Tickets for international matches are part of the sponsorship package with Jersey Rugby. They are used carefully and strategically to help secure inward investment from individuals and businesses. Inward investment is a key pillar of the States Strategic Plan and the economic growth and diversification strategy. The other Crown Dependencies and England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and jurisdictions small and large, place the highest priority and expend many millions of pounds on activity designed to attract investment that provides jobs for the benefit of residents, and helps build communities. Locate Jersey is a fully-functioning business development agency carrying out important legitimate business development activity. Indeed, it is for this very reason that Locate Jersey was established. Make no mistake, this is a highly competitive market with over 800 inward investment agencies active in Europe alone, all of whom want the business we are competing for. Locate Jersey has to work hard to stand out from the crowd. We invest thousands in Locate Jersey but, as published figures clearly identify, that investment returns millions of pounds to the Treasury; income that helps pay for nurses, teachers and the broad range of public services we deliver to the community.

The Deputy Bailiff:

If you could bring your answer to a close, Minister, you are well over the ...

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Yes, Sir. I believe that this expenditure is not only fully justified, but delivers excellent return for the taxpayer's money. The Deputy's question contains a fundamental misconception.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, Minister, it has now been 2 minutes after the question; I would be grateful if you could bring your answer to a close.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

Okay. Finally, it would be remiss of me not to address, and this is important, some of the Deputy's social media activity on this subject. Please hear me out, Sir.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am sorry, no. That is not directed as an answer to the question that has been put, I am afraid, Minister. The answer must be ...

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am afraid, Sir, that the Deputy has connected it to the question, because I have here a ream of screenshots of social media activity that needs to be addressed.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Senator, I must ask you to stop now and sit down because that answer is not directed to the thrust of the question, which is the justification to the expenditure, and nothing more than that. A supplementary, Deputy Mézec?

5.8.1 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

Thank you for that ruling, Sir, which was entirely justified, but can the Minister provide tangible evidence, and when I say “tangible”, that is the key word, that there has been an economic benefit as a direct result of this particular expedition and this particular expenditure which his department is engaged in? Tangible evidence that can be proved, not just some theoretical outcome he might anticipate.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

The Deputy’s question is clearly based on a very poor appreciation of the work that my department, specifically Locate Jersey, does. Our records show that the Deputy has never set foot in my department, he has never contacted any of my staff, Assistant Ministers, or even myself to try to understand more about what we do, which is a great shame. I wish the Deputy would stop gurning at me across the Chamber; it is very off-putting. He is very welcome, and I extend an open invitation, not only to him, but his comrades in the Reform Party, and any other Members of the Assembly who wish to come and discuss this. There is tangible evidence that Locate Jersey delivers millions of pounds worth of benefit to this Island. It creates jobs, inward investment and wealth. The Deputy might not like that, but it is true. It is working well and I and my Assistant Ministers fully support its work, and the great efforts of the staff that bring in that investment.

5.8.2 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

What analysis has been done to establish that sports events are effective in attracting business or high-net-worth individuals to Jersey? Why was rugby chosen, and what other sports events, or what other events, even, were considered?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I am surprised that the Senator does not understand what sport tourism and sports can do for the economy and the community. She just has to think back to the Olympics, or even in our case the Island Games, and the tremendous economic boost that that gave us. We get a number of bonuses from sponsoring rugby. Locate Jersey started sponsoring rugby in 2012 and has gradually been reducing its sponsorship now to make way for other commercial sponsors. We get a tremendous return on the people who visit Jersey for the rugby, and we get a tremendous benefit for the community as now hundreds, if not thousands, of children are involved in the sport.

5.8.3 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

I was talking about analysis to establish whether such invitations were effective. I suppose the follow-up question is: is rugby a particular interest to senior members of staff?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I think I have answered the Senator’s question, it is very clear. If she cannot see the benefit to the Island of Jersey playing in the top tier of national rugby then, I am afraid, I cannot help her any further.

5.8.4 Deputy C.F. Labey of Grouville:

I do see the benefit of Locate Jersey’s networking, however, could the Minister confirm if it is Locate Jersey that is issuing the grant or is it the Economic Development Department? If it is not Locate Jersey, why does it have automatic rights to these tickets? If they are given to the rugby club, why are the tickets not allocated to volunteers, to aspiring young rugby players and public people? Why should they go to the officers of Locate Jersey every time?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

If the Deputy lengthened her research slightly, she would find out. That is exactly what Jersey Rugby does. It gives a lot of tickets to youngsters, people participating in the sport. Locate Jersey gets a small percentage of those and the Locate Jersey Department is part of the Economic Development Department but it has its own budget. The rugby sponsorship is paid from that budget. She did mention tickets are going to the staff, and this is where there was a fundamental misconception in the original question, because the staff do not claim expenses to go out on a jolly and watch rugby matches; they claim expenses because they are working, work this Assembly has tasked them to, work in hours above their normal working hours, often evenings and weekends, and beyond that which is reasonably required of them. They do that to target developing Jersey's highly successful inward investment programme, and they do it because, like me and you, Sir, and the Council of Ministers and all of the Members in this Assembly, they believe in Jersey and they want Jersey to continue to succeed.

The Deputy Bailiff:

There are a number of Members who still wish to ask questions. Given the time available, I will not be able to allow supplementary questions to the questions that are asked simply because there are too many people who now want to ask and there is a limited amount of time available to us. Deputy Hilton?

5.8.5 Deputy J.A. Hilton:

I do not doubt for one moment the value of the work carried out by Locate Jersey, but this is taxpayers' money and it is important the public is aware of how its money is being spent. My question is: can the Minister confirm whether any States Members availed themselves of tickets and complimentary hospitality to watch rugby at Twickenham?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I cannot. I think it is highly unlikely, but I will find out and check and get back to the Deputy. I certainly have not; I can tell her that much.

5.8.6 Deputy M. Tadier:

To try and deconstruct the false dichotomy that the Minister is perpetuating, I do not think anyone would suggest that Jersey Rugby is not great value for money; it has got to be one of the best investments that was made and it brings lots of money to the Island, but that is not the same as justifying spending £6,000 so that civil servants can go and sit and watch rugby matches there. Presumably their presence in the crowd was of utmost importance, and perhaps the camera focused on their faces while they were sitting in the crowd wearing their Jersey banana pin badge, and doubt that justified the £6,000. But could the Minister say for the record what they were doing, and state also for the record whether it was the same South Africa jolly golf boys that were going on these trips to watch the rugby, and what they achieved during those visits that required them to watch rugby?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I refer the Deputy to my previous answer. When we put things into context, about £4,000 was incurred in costs over a 4-year period.

5.8.7 Deputy A.D. Lewis:

I wonder if it might be helpful if the Minister could explain the long period of time it sometimes takes to convert business leads of the like that may have been achieved from this type of hospitality? If the Minister could explain that it might become more apparent as to what the

tangible return from this type of activity is. I think he might agree that it takes a long time to convert such business leads through such activity.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I refer the Deputy to the published figures. I ask him to look at the number of inward investors, the number of high-net-worth individuals, the fact that we had 4 per cent economic growth in 2014 and 2 per cent in 2015. I could go on, but I will not. Locate Jersey is working. Our economy is growing and the Locate Jersey contribution, in which we invest thousands, returns millions. I urge Members to continue to support it, because it is very important. We are creating jobs that we need. This is not short-termism, this is creating foundations, this is building on foundations for the future to give Jersey a good long-term economic outlook.

5.8.8 Deputy G.P. Southern:

The Minister may have given up on Senator Ferguson but can he explain to me, and can he produce the evidence that says the approach he and his officers are taking is producing returns?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

At the risk of repeating myself, I refer the Deputy to the numerous amounts of published facts about the benefits that Locate Jersey is delivering. They are all there in black and white, and I urge the Deputy to have a look at them now and again and get some facts.

5.8.9 Connétable M.P.S. Le Troquer of St. Martin:

Much has been said about the £6,000 which has come about from the Freedom of Information request, however, it now looks like the Minister and the department have been caught out. Could the Minister explain if there are other similar expenses incurred in attracting such residents and make those public so that we do not look like we are being caught out every time.

Senator L.J. Farnham:

We have not been caught out at all. I am extremely proud of the work Locate Jersey does. I am extremely proud of the work that the members of staff in my department do. I am proud of the fact that Locate Jersey works with Jersey Finance and Digital Jersey and Visit Jersey and Jersey Business and Farm Jersey and Genuine Jersey; all working together. We, the States Assembly, agreed to invest millions of pounds in promoting our Island and promoting the economy, and I am very proud of that. I really think that a few thousand pounds on targeted corporate hospitality as part of a sponsorship package that has given tremendous support to our local rugby club, which has not only helped develop our business links but has helped develop the community, is a very good investment and it is money well spent. I have no problem at all with continuing to give it my full support. In direct answer to the question: yes, there is other money spent on corporate hospitality by all the agencies involved in promoting the Island, and some of the Ministers involved in supporting that, and it is very worthwhile, in my opinion.

[11:00]

5.8.10 Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

With advance notice of this question the Minister could have reasonably foreseen that a supplementary question would be to produce tangible evidence that there is specific benefit from these specific trips. Instead, he chooses to cast aspersions against other Members in a weird justification of the jollies that his department is serially involved in. I ask him a final time: can he cite ... he is not even listening; I do not know why I am particularly bothering to ask the question. Could he cite a specific study, report or review that has concluded that particular endeavours like this do have a tangible benefit, and if he cannot find a specific one

to cite right now, will he promise to send that particular report or study to Members so they can see directly that these trips, not other trips, not other endeavours, are of a benefit to taxpayers who are making a return that is greater than the amount that is spent on it?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can you point to a report or reports, or something like that, Senator?

Senator L.J. Farnham:

I can report to record numbers of people employed, record economic growth. I do not think it is necessary to commission and spend money and waste time on producing reports when the facts and figures are already there. The Deputy does not like it because it is success and we are being successful. Very fortunately, this society is not all poor. Society works hard and the majority of people in this Island are making a strong success of their lives and this Government and Assembly work for all people across all walks of society. They are not all the Deputy and the Reform Party's clients, but we work for everybody and we are doing a very good job, Locate Jersey is doing a very good job. We must all work hard and work together to continue with this economic growth that is creating really vital jobs.