

4.15 The Connétable of St. John to the Minister for Treasury and Resources regarding the new billing system used by Jersey Telecom:

Further to the introduction of the new billing system by Jersey Telecom, can the Minister, as shareholder representative, detail the number of complaints received since this new system began, including how many related to the small font size, the format of the bills; the cessation of cheque payments; charges for non-existent items such as broadband or additional phones, or the length of time it took to process a complaint?

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

The change in the J.T. billing system was, in reality, quite a fundamental and wholesale change to the systems that J.T. uses to provide management information, deal with customer services, run their business and billing. It is, in fact, J.T.'s whole trading system and operating platform. The previous system was out of support and it was in fact probably the most significant risk that the business faced. Extensive changes of this nature are extremely challenging to all businesses and J.T. has widely acknowledged that there have been difficulties and there were going to be challenges before the issue happened. The C.E.O. (Chief Executive Officer) wrote twice to every customer and every customer was aware of the changes that were going on. On average, J.T. receives, I am advised, 1,200 billing queries into its contact centre per week, and while this number increased quite substantially in November and December immediately after the migration to the new system, from 4th December the number of calls has now returned to normal. The Connétable asks about complaints. J.T. differentiates between queries and actual complaints. As far as complaints are concerned, there have been 89 received since the introduction of the new billing system, 9 of which remain open. There are none for the small font size, 8 for the layout and format, 8 for the withdrawal of cheque payments, 6 in relation to charges and 15 in relation to waiting times at the call centre. J.T. acknowledge that this has been extremely challenging and they are working hard to resolve the outstanding issues as quickly as possible. J.T. have committed to me to review all feedback following the bedding-in of the new system and they are open to alternative and further improvements in the billing system that has now been rolled-out, and it is a substantial improvement for what was previously the billing system.

4.15.1 The Connétable of St. John:

Given the Minister's reply, can he please explain the time lag in dealing with complaints because I have got papers here that prove, as far back as 1st January this year, a telephone complaint about a broadband charge where there is no broadband on this particular telephone. There was a returned call on 8th January stating that the charge would be removed from the billing and as of last week the billing is still being charged. Can he explain if complaints are dealt with and within the period of time, as he quoted a few moments ago, how come these things are still going on in longer periods, i.e. over a month to deal with one complaint?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Assistant Minister and the Treasurer and I had 3 hours with the Chief Executive of J.T. and the Finance Director and the Operations Manager yesterday to prepare exactly, as the Connétable would expect, for difficult questions about what has been a difficult transition. We reviewed detailed information from the call centre, the amount of calls going through, and there were unacceptable delays in November and December. The data that we reviewed last night showed that improvements are now rapidly being made and complaints which are elevated to the Chief Executive himself to personally deal with are now falling rapidly in terms of their number. If there is a particular constituent I will personally pass that on to the Chief Executive who will respond to the issue. This has been a difficult rollout, it is a

challenge for the company, but the company is in a much better position with a much better billing system, which customers are going to benefit, but there have been problems, and that is acknowledged by J.T.

[11:30]

4.15.2 The Connétable of St. John:

The problems, if I could put another supplementary, the Minister said there were problems in November and December. My own account, dated 27th January, we are still being told that there are delays on invoice billing for the last couple of months. It is still ongoing so when are we going to see the bills coming out on time, given that this is a States 100 per cent owned company, that we get our money in on time, we are running weeks behind?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The new billing system, and the whole new ... and it is not just a printer that deals out with billing. This is fundamentally a completely new system to have J.T. to be operating ... the old system, as the Chief Executive explained, was in a world which did not have broadband, it was a States department, mobile phones were something that was talked about on *Tomorrow's World*. The new system is a new system capable of getting J.T. to run its business properly and to maximise its accounts receivable and to deal better with customer service. There are still problems and they are resolving them. They have put additional resources into their call centre. There are normally about 40 people in the call centre. The numbers of calls that went into the call centre I think virtually doubled. They are resolving issues. If people get on to the call centre J.T. will resolve those issues, and if they need to be elevated the Chief Executive was in the call centre himself last week, as I would expect a hands-on chief executive to be.

4.15.3 The Connétable of St. John:

Once again you will cut me off at the knees.

The Bailiff:

I am amazed you are not much smaller. [Laughter]

The Connétable of St. John:

I am shrinking, Sir. One of the big complaints though is the font size. Look at the font size, and this is a photocopy of my own bill. The font size is so small for elderly people, and we have a lot of people who keep their telephone solely because it is the only means of contact, when they get the bill they have difficulty in reading it. It is done in this pale green colour, which does not stand out. Could they please look at putting something that is user friendly, nicely bold, so that the size and the font and the colour stand out? There was nothing wrong I am told with the old billing system, and I would agree with them, as far as the face and the presentation. Could that be looked at please?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The Assistant Minister will bear me up; we really did go through in detail with J.T. about this. I have to say, J.T. ran a focus group which included the Senior Citizens Association and they got feedback ... in fact one of the areas that J.T. did in reality probably, was that they listened to a focus group of the complainants that wanted improvement and one of them was - and I have got an example of a bill on my iPad - what customers wanted, what senior citizens wanted, was to know what the amount of the bill was in big font, so I do not know where the Connétable has got his bill. But the font size of what is owed is right in massive great big

print. J.T. is almost like a Minister, they cannot win either way. They did consult with the Senior Citizens Association, they did have a focus group and people still are not happy. What I am confident of is that they are continuing to listen, that this new system will deliver far better information to all types of customers, will deliver real-time information to people about their bills and J.T. are listening, as I would expect them to do, they are a communications company. But if the Connétable wants to come in to see them I am happy to take him by the hand and get an iPad for him at the same time. **[Laughter]**

4.15.4 The Connétable of St. John:

I had a meeting with them for several hours in December. Members will see the font size of a bill, which is a standard ... I have a number of lines and really you need a magnifying glass or, in my case, I have to hold it out there. Will the Minister please take that on board? I am speaking on behalf of the many people who have contacted me about this.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I often stand in this Assembly and say: “Yes, I will listen to the issue and I will respond to it.” We have a board who is charged with managing this company on the people of Jersey’s behalf. They are well aware of the issues. I see a number of Members gesticulating and saying: “That is not true what the Connétable is saying. Bills are clearer .:.”

The Connétable of St. John:

Point of order.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

No, I am not giving way.

The Connétable of St. John:

I did not say any untruths. The facts are there and you can see them for yourself. If any Members have got a problem there they are.

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

J.T. has dealt with a big issue. They have learnt lessons. They have been contrite. They have responded. They have put more resources in and they will continue to improve the billing information, which at the end of the day is designed to give customers better, more detailed, information in real-time about their bills. They have learnt lessons and it will continue to be improved. People need to call J.T. if they have got problems; they will respond.

The Connétable of St. John:

You cannot get them on the telephone.

The Bailiff:

I am sorry, Connétable, I had in fact forgotten that I had seen Senator Ferguson’s light before allowing you so many.

4.15.5 Senator S.C. Ferguson:

Just a quick one: the queries towards the end of December will have dropped because the latest bills were much delayed. We had an apology from the company and I will be contacting them later this week about my bill which is gobbledegook. But how much testing was there and how much did the whole system cost?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

The whole system was £10 million, and we discussed that last night. That gives Members perhaps an indication this was almost a complete rewiring of the entire platform that J.T. operate in. So a big thing. They had 3 dress rehearsals in relation to the data transfer, some of which did not work because of the old billing system with the data that the old billing system have simply being completely inadequate for customer needs, which has ended up with some mistakes being made. I cannot add any more than that.

The Bailiff:

That brings questions on notice to an end so we will now move to questions without notice and the first period is to the Minister for Treasury and Resources.