

3.15 Deputy S. Power of the Minister for Economic Development regarding queues at check-in desks at Jersey Airport

Given that passenger queues at the airport are often out the door of the departure terminal at peak times during the summer, what action, if any, will the Minister be taking to encourage Flybe to make more check-in desks available for the customers during the summer or adopt the common user terminal technology known as C.U.T.E.

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

I see the Deputy is gamekeeper turned poacher in a matter of seconds. I agree with the Deputy, however, that recent queuing at the airport at peak times was totally unsatisfactory. Airport management have discussed this matter at the highest level of Flybe to help ensure that the problem is resolved. Discussions have been open and constructive and will continue in early November when the airport is hosting a workshop for all airlines, ground handlers and retail partners. The aim of the workshop is to help improve customer service and ensure a better and more streamlined process for passengers. I am also delighted to confirm that Flybe is currently connecting to the new C.U.T.E. technology at the airport.

3.15.1 Deputy S. Power:

I wonder if the Minister would be prepared to comment? The number of the people who have queued out the door of the terminal building during August and early September was unacceptable and we run the grave risk of these people never returning to Jersey if they are treated in this way, trying to get on a flight, 12 or 13 flights, midday Saturday and Sunday. It is a P.R. (Public Relations) disaster for the Island. Would the Minister not agree?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

Yes, I would agree. I think one person queuing outside of the terminal building is unacceptable, let alone the queues that we saw at the time. So, I do agree with the Deputy's sentiments that the problem has to be resolved and we are doing what we can in discussions with Flybe in order to do so.

3.15.2 Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

I wonder if the Minister, when his airport manager saw the queues building up, can he inform the House whether they immediately contacted Flybe's management in order to see whether the matter could be resolved or did they allow the situation just to grow and grow?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

It was not just a question of allowing the situation to grow and grow. I can confirm that the airport staff did contact the duty officers with regard to Flybe and there was a collective effort in order to try and resolve the problem. It was far more deep rooted than something that could be resolved in a matter of minutes, but we need, as I said a moment ago, to find an acceptable solution in discussions with Flybe to ensure this does not happen again. It is not an acceptable position.

3.15.3 The Deputy of St. John:

Given in the 1990s when we extended the airport terminal to take additional check-in desks, et cetera, and we had a million tourists per annum plus at that time, we now have 50 per cent less in 2009 than we had then, how can this have come about? Will the Minister please explain, given that he has already told us that we have got 2 new

operators within the terminal selling goods, he mentioned La Mare Vineyards and another a few moments ago, will he please tell how come we have now a building which is too small for people to stay in given the huge size the building was?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

The Deputy is conflating issues here. First of all, I would comment, there is no shortage of check-in desks. The issue is more a question of airlines' utilisation of desks and that is the basis of the conversations that are being undertaken at the moment. I repeat there are no shortage of check-in desks and it really is a matter for the airlines in discussions with the airport to resolve. As far as the second part of the Deputy's question regarding the retail area, there is plenty of space in the retail area once passengers pass through. There is plenty of seating available, despite recent media comment, both upstairs and downstairs. I do not feel there is a shortage of space at all in the new retail environment.

3.15.4 Deputy S. Power:

Final question for me. Is the Minister aware that during the periods of check-in delays and frustration that some check-in staff were reduced to tears on these weekends because of stress dealing with unhappy members of the public? Can he make sure that no airline puts their staff in this position again?

Senator A.J.H. Maclean:

I can imagine that it was extremely stressful for the check-in staff. It is not for me to ensure that that is the case. I think that we should bear in mind first of all it is not the airline staff necessarily, it is the ground handling staff. They are the ones that we should feel sorry for. It is a matter that needs to be resolved collectively between all the parties involved in checking people through the airport. It is a problem that is being worked on and it needs to be resolved.