

The perennial excuse - 'commercial confidentiality'

Written by WRT

Friday, 16 November 2012 12:05 - Last Updated Monday, 19 November 2012 08:58

Did the Speaker Rodan eventually get an answer to his October Tynwald written question 16 to which we referred in [our FOI piece 17.10.12](#) ?

Well yes and no! The Chief Minister replied 3 weeks later, thus finally completing a long list of consultant appointments

Rodan's original question in January asked for detailed information including the total cost of each government consultancy contract.

In the latest answer two posts stand out - Director of European Affairs (Chief Secretary's Office) and Financial Services Advisor (DED). Each is a 3 year appointment, but no details of fees are given because of the perennial excuse of 'commercial confidentiality'.

Remember these consultants are not Civil Servants, yet they are extremely influential in shaping government policy. They sit on the inner cabinet, the National Strategy Group.

Why should it be necessary to keep secret their fees? Not declaring them raises suspicion with the public.

The perennial excuse - 'commercial confidentiality'

Written by WRT

Friday, 16 November 2012 12:05 - Last Updated Monday, 19 November 2012 08:58

Also Mr Bell did not answer the final part of the question - *"What data protection issues prevent the answer being fully provided?"*

Contradiction of data protection law is another regular reason trotted out for refusal to divulge information. Very often this is specious reasoning. Rodan's question deserves a considered explanation.

More recently, when questioned in Keys, DoSC Minister Robertshaw cited commercial confidentiality as his reason for not disclosing the fee paid to UK company Atos Healthcare. Atos is contracted for a 6 month pilot scheme conducting IOM claimant reviews in relation to the personal capacity assessment for incapacity benefits.

He did however state: *"I can advise that the Department is being charged by Atos Healthcare the same, on a pro rata basis, as is charged to the Department of Work and Pensions, and that I am satisfied that we are getting excellent value for money."*

The perennial excuse - 'commercial confidentiality'

Written by WRT

Friday, 16 November 2012 12:05 - Last Updated Monday, 19 November 2012 08:58

Does the Minister not know that Atos has come in for much criticism from the UK National Audit Office, for not providing value for money!

A number of Westminster parliamentary questions reveal that Atos has completed 738,000 assessments under a contract worth £112million. That could indicate that each assessment costs about £150. If so is that good value? Again the Manx public should know.

It really is time for our politicians to provide lucid answers and not attempt to duck out of fully informing an increasingly inquisitive public about how public money is spent.