

CAA: Thomas Carr

Belfast International (BFS): Alan Whiteside

BFS set out that the airport changed ownership in October 2013. The contract was renegotiated at the time of the ownership under Abertis where the airport was part of a group with Cardiff and Luton airports. Each of the TANS contracts terminated at different times. Abertis considered operating a tender for the group of airports but consider that it was more appropriate to tender only at Luton.

BFS set out that a key driver for this complexity. The Luton contracting being just an aerodrome service was considered relatively straightforward to tender. Both Belfast International and Cardiff airports were considered to be more complex with aerodrome and approach functions and also the presence of delegated functions.

BFS utilised the information gathered through the Luton tender to inform its decision making and its eventual renegotiation with NSL. BFS set out that the biggest issues raised in the Luton tender was the price of risk by third parties around Trust of a Promise (ToaP). The risk being the need to recruit and train new ATCO's to replace those that elected to stay with NSL.

BFS entered into negotiations with NSL that were not entirely satisfactory – partly due to internal corporate decision on contract design. The renegotiation resulted in a saving of £[X] to a year 1 price of £[X]. However due to the contract design the realised saving was only £[X] due to loss of revenue from rental of buildings etc.

BFS stated that NSL operates a delegated function with regards to the terminal manoeuvring area around Belfast. BFS stated that it was unclear on the costs and benefits of hosting the approach service it is told by NSL that it receives a [X] discount on its TANS costs for hosting the services. BFS have no sight of this costing. BFS noted that the costs are likely to be in increased numbers of ATCOs on sight, although it did recognise some benefits in control over local airspace.

Overall BFS still consider that NSL is likely to be expensive particularly if compared to self supply. BFS did consider self supply but did not consider it had suitable in-house experience on which to fully explore the issues. Further BFS would have faced the same ToaP risk as third parties at Luton and would have had to bare that cost. Additionally at the time NSL held the engineering expertise for its aging infrastructure, although BFS has taken and is taking steps to remedy this by upgrading its ANS infrastructure. [X].

Looking forward BFS is currently reviewing all of its operation at the airport. Motivated by the new ownership and a new Managing Director BFS is currently looking at both in-house and tender options for when its contract expires in three years. BFS has concerns about taking the service in house, as outlined above but, also include recruitment, retention and career progression. BFS is considering whether these issues could be circumvented by a joint venture with either an ANSP or between differing airports to provide economies of scale.

BFS also noted that it is considering differing options to employ new technology. These include considering joint approaches, particularly it sees benefits in this with Belfast City airport and potentially with Derry, and remote towers. It is currently undertaking operational trials to allow the aerodrome service to monitor radar in low traffic periods, such as over night.

BFS is interested in the outcome of the current litigation between NATS and Gatwick Airport Ltd as this has the potential to bring DFS into the UK market.