



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.03 p.m. – 6.35 p.m.

Gibraltar, Monday, 24th June 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.03 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

PRAYER

Madam Speaker

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Monday, 24th June 2024.

Order of Proceedings: (ii) Confirmation of Minutes – the Minutes of the seventh meeting of the 15th Parliament, which was held on 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 28th May 2024.

5

Madam Speaker: May I sign the Minutes as correct?

Members: Aye.

10

Madam Speaker signed the Minutes.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

Clerk: (iii) Communications from the Chair; (iv) Petitions; (v) Announcements; (vi) Papers to be laid – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

15

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Second Annual Report of the Independent Monitoring Authority for Citizens' Rights.

Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

HOUSING AND THE UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Q500/2024

South District –

Action points following Minister's meeting

Clerk: (vii) Reports of Committees; (viii) Answers to Oral Questions.
Questions to the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University. Question 500. The Hon. the
20 Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Please state which action points are being addressed in respect of the South District following the Minister for Housing's meeting there.

25 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.

Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, I kindly ask the hon. Member to refer to published HM Government Press Release 404/2024, issued on 4th June 2024.
30

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful for that reference, and of course we are aware of that. In relation to the particular issues raised, were there any that the South District were most concerned about that the Minister agreed to act on in a particular timescale? Is there a particular timescale agreed on these issues?
35

Hon. P A Orfila: All the issues were important to us, and they are all being looked at by the Minister involved with the petitions.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q501/2024

Varyl Begg –

Companies to carry out works

40 **Clerk:** Question 501. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Please state which company or companies, to include subcontractors, are expected to be contracted to carry out the works at Varyl Begg Estate.

45 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.

Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, I can confirm that Gibraltar Joinery and Building Services Ltd (GJBS) are the main contractors for the Varyl Begg Estate project. Furthermore, and in addition to this, I am also informed by GJBS that they have subcontracted the following work: external render – Inline Framing Ltd; windows – AJR Window Works Ltd; and scaffold – Euroresa (Gibraltar) Ltd.
50

55 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** These subcontracts that are entered into, given that this is a sort of public contract, is that with the consent of the Government? Does there need to be a procedure by which consent is granted, or is there an ability for the main contractor to undertake those subcontracts without reference to the Government?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, those contracted to date are GJBS's main subcontractors.

60 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, I understand that, but is there a process by which consent needs to be given by the Government in relation to subcontracts entered into by the main contractor, or not; or is the main contractor at liberty to subcontract to particular entities or entities on an approved panel? How does it work?

65 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, nothing has changed in the context of the operations of GJBS from the time that that company was successfully created in the late 1980s and through the last three and a half decades. They are the ones with the technical knowledge, they are the ones who manage their business, they are the contractor to the Government and they are able to subcontract in the manner that they consider appropriate, exactly as was the case
70 when the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was a Minister.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I just ask, in relation to the works themselves, in terms of timescale and cost, does the Minister have information in relation to that?

75 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Can I have a more specific question, please?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Okay, a more specific question would be: how much have those works cost?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I think the hon. Member meant if the hon. Gentleman asked a specific question, we would have the information.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am happy to submit a question or ask my colleague to submit a more specific one, in future.

85 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q502/2024
Europa Point hostel –
Current plans

Clerk: Question 502. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. D J Bossino.

90 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what are the current plans in respect of the hostel which the Government had stated was going to be built at Europa Point?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.

95 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, the position remains unchanged. The Government is considering whether the hostel will be located at Europa Point or at a different location.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is it just a location issue or is it also a size-of-hostel issue? There have been figures bandied about before. Is the Government reviewing the position in relation to the size of the hostel?

100

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, it could vary. It might be bigger. What you are asking is are there current plans. The current plans are there. It remains unchanged, but we are considering whether it should go in Europa Point or at a different location. That is where we are at the moment.

105

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Minister willing to share the other possible location with the House?

Hon. P A Orfila: Sorry, not at this point.

110

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And given that there is this consideration process of the Government, is there some kind of timescale by which they would expect to take a decision in relation to, at least, location; and, if so, does it have a knock-on effect on commencement of the project?

115

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as I have said before, and echoing the words of the former Chief Minister and the last successful and only successful leader of the GSD, when it comes to timings, we have the lifetime of this Parliament to deliver. Hon. Members keep pressing us for timescales, when we have commitments to deliver for the lifetime of this Parliament. Our obligation is to deliver them in the lifetime of this Parliament, and when we do not have a different timescale, we are not going to give it.

120

Madam Speaker: Next question.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND SPORT

Q486/2024

Europa sports grounds– Cleaning and upkeep

Clerk: Questions for the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Question 486. The Hon. E J Reyes.

125

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, why is no cleaning or upkeep of spectator facilities at the Europa sports grounds being carried out?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

130

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, the spectator facilities are cleaned regularly, not necessarily as a matter of routine. However, it is thoroughly cleaned before and after every event. Works to repair and repaint the spectator facilities are currently taking place.

135

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I have frequented the Europa sportsground and sat in the general public stand, and I can assure the Minister that the cleanliness of the place leaves a lot to be desired. The ablutions are unusable. The stench from the gents – and, I am told, from the

140 ladies – is incredible. You could not even get the light switch ... Nowadays, most of us carry a
mobile phone with a little app where you can switch the light on. I thank the Almighty for that
because otherwise I would have stumbled in there.

145 Perhaps the Minister, on his next visit, where he is received as Minister and taken to different
seats, would like to have a wander around the general spectators' place to see the cleanliness. I
highly recommend that the Minister takes a clothes brush to brush off the dust, and that he takes
his own water supply and so on, because even the drinking fountain, which I believe was, once
upon a time, silver or stainless steel, is now totally black and more in keeping with the colour of
the road tar around the place. Would the Minister agree with me, or accept that he should perhaps
visit the general members' stands?

150 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, my answer to Question 496 might put him at ease.

Q495-96/2024
Europa Sports Complex –
Management arrangements and manning levels; ball stop nets

Clerk: Question 495. The Hon. E J Reyes.

155 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can the Government update this House with full details in respect of
developments since the answer provided to Question 571/2023, referring to the contract and/or
other arrangements to permanently settle the management and manning levels at the Europa
Sports Complex?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

160 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam
Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 496.

Clerk: Question 496. The Hon. E J Reyes.

165 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can the Government update this House in respect of the still outstanding
problems in providing a permanent solution to the ball stop nets at the Europa sports ground?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

170 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar can confirm that the
external areas of the Europa Sports Complex, such as the playing pitches, stands and training
facilities, will be managed and maintained by the GFA. We are currently in negotiations with the
GFA and the GSLA for the management of the internal areas of the complex.

175 In relation to Question 496, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the GFA are currently in the
process of investing over £1 million into the facilities at the Europa Sports Complex. As part of the
upgrade of the facilities, we are working on a permanent solution to the ball stop nets.

180 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful for that, Madam Speaker. If I recall correctly, in previous
questions, perhaps in the previous Parliament, we were informed that a company or a trust – the
Minister kept using the two words interchangeably, and we never quite got to the bottom of it –
had been entered into, the composition of which was independent members appointed by the
Minister, representatives of the Gibraltar Squash Club, the Cricket Association and the Rugby

185 Association. Now that the Minister has mentioned that there seems to be some sort of arrangement with the GFA, can he enlighten this House as to what has happened with the previous arrangements as announced in this House?

190 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, I believe the hon. Gentleman might be mistaken with the conversation we had in the street, rather than here in Parliament. There was talk, before my time, of having a trust running the facilities, but we have chosen to go, at least for the outdoor areas, with the GFA, and for the indoor areas with the GFA/GSLA, as it makes more sense from a management point of view and from a financial point of view as well.

195 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. No, there is no confusion on my part. We may have had conversations in the street, but I am sure, with a bit of research in *Hansard*, the question and answer happened across the floor of this House. I see from one of my colleagues that he clearly remembers the conversations we had. So, those were the official answers as tabled prior to last election. Post the election – I think it was last November – the Minister said that he had to update himself, and I gave him that time and space, which is why eight or nine months earlier on ... in the same way that I recall clearly when I asked questions about the ball stop nets, the Minister
200 at the time stood up and said, ‘No, they have been fixed,’ and I had to come back the next month and say, ‘I have been back to the place and those nets have not been fixed.’ He apologised and corrected it. He said he had been led to believe they had been fixed, and they had not. So, here we are, the facilities building in 2019 – gosh, five years ago; that is quite a long time – still not fully settled. The ball stop nets are still not properly fit for purpose. I have made reference in the past
205 that when you have certain quicker games happening – because we have some rather good batsmen locally and they are what are called big hitters; they have even had to close the children’s play park at the eastern end during the course of a weekend for their own safety ... I have witnessed those balls flying well out of the ground and these ball stop nets are what will stop it being a danger to children.

210 So, I am rather confused with the whole setup. I am asking the Minister: the previous arrangements announced across the floor of this House, have those now been done away with, or does that entity still exist and still have a management role in some shape or form in the Europa Sports Complex? I know there are certain entities operating on a private catering basis there and so on, who I know have nothing at all to do with the GFA. We – and I am saying ‘we’ as sports
215 lovers and users – are at a bit of a loss as to the actual structure there. I am trying to get as much of an answer as possible now, because otherwise I will have to wait till probably nearly Christmastime before legitimately I can table a question again.

220 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, I am really sorry but I am lost: in all of that, what is the question?

225 **Hon. E J Reyes:** If I break down the questions, then, Madam Speaker: the previously announced management structure by a company or trust, have they no longer any role to play – shall I start with that? – and it is now exclusively the GFA?

Hon. L M Bruzon: That is correct, Madam Speaker. The trust no longer has anything to do with the running of the facilities.

230 **Hon. E J Reyes:** And what arrangements then arise out of that? There are other entities – companies, I believe they are – that use the facilities, the indoor ones, from where they run businesses, like catering businesses and so on, not just to provide food and beverage for the spectators but they even prepare food and other similar supplies which are then taken out of the premises and actually –

Madam Speaker: I am going to press The hon. Member for the question.

235

Hon. E J Reyes: Sorry, Madam Speaker. I am asking: what are the arrangements for those entities that are not part of the GFA but operate businesses using the premises of the Europa sportsground, such as the catering ones?

240

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, if there are any businesses using the catering facilities, for example, I suppose that they will be able to carry on using them, as long as they carry on paying the rent.

245

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, the Minister is supposing. I am asking, so we have a record on *Hansard*: are these people licensed, or do they have a lease to use the premises? What exactly? What is their financial contribution?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that question.

250

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I can give notice, but with your leave I would need to raise that notice within the six-month period, which will be before Christmas.

255

Madam Speaker: The hon. Member could have filed that question for this session specifically this time around, but by all means file the question the hon. Member thinks is appropriate and we will have a discussion as to whether it is.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know I can come and seek your advice when it comes to that moment.

260

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I just ask: has the change in management arrangements that now appear to be going to the GFA been with the consent of the structure that had been put in place some time ago?

265

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I have had numerous meetings with the different sporting associations that use the facilities, that call the facilities their home. I have had meetings with people who were involved in the setup of the structure, and everyone is in full agreement with the new change for the GFA and the GSLA.

270

Hon. C A Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I do not know if the Minister will afford me the luxury of asking a question which is slightly off but still to do with the complex, but from a sporting perspective, will the sports that call the Europa Sports Complex their home be affected in any way? In other words, will they continue to have the same use and availability that they did before?

275

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, they are more than welcome to call it their home. As an example, the Tercentenary Sports Hall is the home of basketball but it is also used by netball, volleyball and futsal. So, of course they can call it their home.

280

Hon. C A Sacarello: Thank you very much. I am sure they will be happy to call it their home. My question was more geared towards their use and timetabling of allocations at the venue: will that continue to be unimpeded, or will they be affected by the current management arrangements?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, if any sports were to be affected, they would be either cricket or rugby, which use the outdoor facilities, but there have been plenty of meetings between

the GFA, cricket and rugby with regard to each timetable and how they are going to work around
285 it, to make sure that everyone has the allocations that they require.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q497/2024
Lathbury Sports Complex –
Cafeteria

Clerk: Question 497. The Hon. E J Reyes.

290 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can the Government provide full details of any arrangements entered into to provide cafeteria facilities at Lathbury Sports Complex?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

295 **Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon):** Madam Speaker, the cafeteria facilities at Lathbury Sports Complex underwent a public tender process organised under the auspices of the Land Property Services. The successful tenderer was the Mindspace Project. The charity is now working hard to get the area fully operational.

300 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker, because I have a hearing impairment, can the Minister please repeat who the successful tenderer was?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Certainly, Madam Speaker, it is called the Mindspace Project. It is a local charity.

305

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

Hon. E J Reyes: May I, Madam Speaker? The Mindspace Project is probably a registered company. I know the official answer will be that we can go and do a search or whatever, but are
310 they particularly affiliated or form part of any already existing sporting bodies? If I can draw a parallel, I know other places where a particular entity or sporting-type organisation has been given that, and then they come up with a more legitimate type of business. Is this a purely civilian-type organisation, or is it a company that is closely tied with any sporting association or entity?

315 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, the Mindspace Project is a local charity that works in the area of mental health, not only but mainly with young children.

Hon. E J Reyes: And I take it, Madam Speaker, that they are a registered company and will be subject to all the rules and regulations that companies have. Because there has been a connection
320 with a charity thing, do they pay company tax like other companies, or are they exempt because they are a charitable institution? Does the Minister have any further information on that?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, from what I understand, the charity has been running for a number of years, and the cafeteria will be run as a business but the profits from the business
325 will be put into the charity.

Hon. E J Reyes: And they are not subject to the company taxation?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the cafeteria element will be subject to all the laws and requirements that any other business would have.

330

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q498/2024
Children's play parks –
Provision of shaded areas

Clerk: Question 498. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Does the Government have any intention to provide shaded areas in respect of both equipment and seating facilities at all our children's play parks?

335

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, we are currently investigating the feasibility of providing more shaded areas at some of our children's play parks.

340

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I am glad to see that it is being looked into. Can I press the Minister for some sort of timescale? With the much hotter weather... I know a lot of this play equipment, mainly for safety reasons, is made of hard, durable plastics and so on, which tend to heat up and become unusable on children's skin, especially children who wear shorts. I have seen children jumping off these contraptions because they could not bear the heat. Given that we are now officially in the summer season, does the Minister have any timeframe that he is aiming for?

345

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the timeframe, as always, is as quickly as we can. The problem is that there are certain parks, like the ones down at Catalan Bay, where it is quite easy to have sails to protect equipment from the sun, but there are other parks, like Europa, which are very big and subject to winds, so we have to be very careful with what we plan for up there.

350

Madam Speaker: Next question.

355

Q499/2024
Pickleball –
Facilities

Clerk: Question 499. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Does the Government have any plans to construct or grant licences to any other entities to provide pickleball sporting facilities in Gibraltar?

360

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, we are currently exploring all options in relation to the provision of specific pickleball

365 facilities. One such project, which we are hoping to start soon, is the renovation of the tennis court
at the Mount, where the court itself will have a dual purpose as either a tennis court or four
pickleball courts.

Hon. E J Reyes: I think we had a brief exchange last time on the Mount court, and I wanted to
370 be supportive of the Minister at the time.

May I start by asking, Madam Speaker, would this project, whether it is a refurbished tennis
court or pickleball facilities, end up forming part of those falling under the auspices of the GSLA?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Yes, Madam Speaker, the aim is to have the tennis court, pickleball courts
375 and one padel court, which would come under the GSLA.

Hon. E J Reyes: I know, Madam Speaker, that in a few days' time we are going to go into the
Budget session and perhaps we can look into some of the details there, but would this be
government funded out of the Improvement and Development Fund projects, or is there a private
380 entity that has just decided to donate the funds, or otherwise?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, it is privately funded as a donation.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, curiosity beats me: what does the private donor get out of it?
385 I know no one give things away gratis and for nothing.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, just giving back to the community is enough for some
people.

Hon. E J Reyes: I know I am being pedantic, but just double checking: although it may come
390 from these very generous private funds and so on, it will remain exclusively a government-owned
facility managed by a government-owned authority such as the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure
Authority? Or do we owe anything, managerial or whatever, to this donor?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, as per my reply moments ago, it will come under the GSLA.
395

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask who the private donor is?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Yes, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman can ask, and an
400 announcement will be made on inauguration or at another moment when the private donor
considers it is helpful that we should make that announcement. There is no question of this private
donor remaining private or confidential, but it is just a question of choosing the right moment to
make the announcement in respect of someone who wants to give something positive and
something back to this community. They already provide a lot in other sectors and they want to
405 also add their contribution to the field of sport, something which the Government warmly
welcomes and is a demonstration that there are those who do not just contribute in the usual
direct way through their corporations and other methods of taxation but also want to go the extra
mile of contributing in other areas in support of the community, something which no doubt will
be warmly welcomed across the floor of the House.

410

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I understand at the moment he is judging properly
whether to use it as a tennis court or a pickleball facility. Can the Minister confirm that he has
been in discussions with those sports that are part of the wider family, like padel tennis and so
on? If I may add to that, tennis was officially known as lawn tennis. Other than a private club that
415 exists, there is only one other available tennis court in Gibraltar, the one based at the Bayside

Sports Centre, so unless you are a member of a particular private club, your use of tennis facilities is limited, and a similar setup perhaps exists in the heavy demand I know there is for allocation in respect of padel tennis ... who built up their hopes that more and –

420 **Madam Speaker:** May I press the hon. Member for a question?

Hon. E J Reyes: [*Inaudible*] ... enter into a discussion that could lead him, or not, to provide facilities for what, after all, is a brand-new sport in Gibraltar, because I do not believe there is any entity or official association registered as pickleball in Gibraltar, yet there is in respect of tennis and padel tennis.

425

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, I am having discussions with all the stakeholders.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q503/2024

Mobility scooter charging points – Number and location

430 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change. Question 503. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government clarify how many charging points for mobility scooters are currently operational, and the location of each of these points?

435

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Good afternoon, Madam Speaker. There is one charging point for mobility scooters funded by the Government, which is located between Casemates Square and Main Street. The Ministry is actively reviewing other areas for mobility scooter charging points.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I am grateful. I was aware of the location between Casemates and Main Street, and yet I have heard from those unfortunate people who depend heavily on mobility scooters that it seems that that charging point – I do not know if it still is, but very recently – was blocked with a new e-scooter parking bay. Is the Minister aware that access to that point ...? As most mobility scooter users tend to be elderly, people find it extremely difficult to get to the charging point itself.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, no requests and no complaints have been received by my team. I believe that there was one elderly gentleman who used it particularly and, sadly, that gentleman passed away. We have had no complaints that anybody else who wants to use it has difficulty accessing it, but now that the hon. Member has raised it, I will make sure it is checked and, if that is the case, that we allow a passageway should anybody else want to use it.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am extremely grateful, Madam Speaker. It was an elderly lady, actually, not a gentleman, who passed this on to me. I do see her occasionally. I can double check, and if I do get

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confirmation, I will let the Minister know in our usual cordial, friendly manner. I want to place on record that I am grateful that the Minister has taken it on board and will check it, because this point seems to have been, because of its location, extremely popular when someone reaches Main Street and they find they have little power left. I will leave it at that and express my gratitude.

Hon. A Sanchez: And given the number of individuals that use mobility scooters, does the Hon. Minister have any more information he can provide regarding the locations or the number of mobility scooters they envisage they will be providing?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker. This is an initiative of ours, wanting to provide more, but we are not in receipt of representations or of a large demand, which surprises me, if there is such a demand, that it has not come our way. Nevertheless, we feel it is a facility that we should provide and the team is looking at different areas, mainly within the Town area, which is where it is more likely that elderly people or people with conditions that require the assistance of a mobility scooter would like to move around, so this is something that we are looking at.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q504/2024
Disabled parking bays –
Numbers

Clerk: Question 504. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state the number of disabled parking bays in Gibraltar for the following years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 to the present date?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the number of disabled parking bays is reviewed at intervals, and so I can provide figures as at 2018 and 2024 as follows. In 2018, a total of 157 accessible bays and 14 time-restricted three-hour maximum stay accessible bays. In 2024, at present we have 156 accessible bays and 17 time-restricted three-hour maximum stay accessible bays.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, is the Minister satisfied on the ratio? I know he has just explained to us that you have those disabled parking bays that have time limits. The advantage of that is that people who need to go on a particular errand or whatever can use one for a reasonable length of time. Yet in other places, we find that they have become the permanent home, without even having to purchase zone parking, for some individuals. Areas near the Children's Health Centre come to mind. I met a grandmother who had to take her grandson to the Children's Health Centre, and this lady complained, 'Every time I go there, it is always the same car parked there 24/7.' Sometimes it seems that that car does not even have a Gibraltar-issued disabled parking permit but one issued from another country, which it seems we have chosen to recognise, yet other countries outside Gibraltar do not recognise ours.

500 So, my question is: is the Minister satisfied with that ratio? We are all in favour of the concept that parking bays are available for disabled people to go to for a particular purpose, but in practice they have become the permanent free, gratis and for-nothing parking spots for some individuals.

505 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** So, the question, Madam Speaker, is whether I am satisfied about the ...?

Hon. E J Reyes: About the number of parking –

510 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I see, about the ratio. Madam Speaker, I am aware that, as in everything else, some of the bays are abused, and this is something that the traffic wardens regularly monitor. It is not an easy thing, because when you challenge somebody there is always some explanation as to why they have been there for a length of time. These requests are put to the Traffic Commission, which is an independent commission that makes recommendations. I will ask the Traffic Commission whether they feel that there should be some change in that ratio.

515 Without having the information right now as to specifically where each of those parking bays is – it is information that I can gather – I do not want to commit as to whether I am personally satisfied, but I always welcome the possibility of reviewing things and I will ask the Traffic Commission to look at this.

520 **Hon. D J Bossino:** On the basis, Madam Speaker, that there does not seem to have been much in the way of movement in the figures between 2018 and 2024, can I ask the Hon. the Minister whether this is in any way policy driven? In other words, is it something which he, his Department and the Government have taken a view on, that there will not necessarily be an increment of those numbers? It has remained pretty much static for a considerable period of time.

525 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, normally, where there are people who feel they would benefit from the use of a disabled parking bay, they make an approach either to the Ministry or to the Traffic Commission, and these are discussed on their merits. There are regular requests for specific areas. I am not aware of clamouring for the creation of more, so I suspect we probably are somewhere close to what we need; otherwise, I think we would be in receipt of more requests. 530 But as I said, whenever anybody feels that they should have access to an accessible bay, it is put to the Traffic Commission and they consider the parking situation in the area and will then make the necessary recommendations. I am open to consider and review, as I said, always wanting to improve what we provide.

535 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Do I gather from that response that the Hon. Minister is saying that as far as the Traffic Commission is concerned, there is not a maximum number? He said that they work independently. One assumes that they work under some sort of statutory discretionary process, but they are not subjected to a maximum number.

540 May I also ask him this, by way of further question on the response he has just given: is it the case that there are two avenues open to potential applicants? Is it the case that they may apply to the Traffic Commission, which he said in the initial response is an independent statutory body which takes its decisions independently of him and his Department, but a separate avenue open to them is that they can make the application to his Department? I thought that I saw a distinction in his response.

545 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I can confirm that there is no maximum and no minimum, clearly. Both avenues are the same because any requests that are made to my Transport team or me are always referred to the Traffic Commission for their views. There is no way that I would consider myself in a position to allocate directly. I would always refer it to the 550 Traffic Commission.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q505/2024

**Accessible equipment for persons with disabilities on beaches –
Contract for maintenance**

Clerk: Question 505. The Hon. A Sanchez.

555 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government confirm which entity is subcontracted for the maintenance of all accessible equipment for persons with disabilities on our beaches? Could the Government please specify the date of commencement of the contract and the amount paid per year, broken down per financial year, since the commencement of the contract?

560 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, there is no contract. Work is carried out as required by the Mobility Care Centre, which is the only entity in Gibraltar that the Department is aware can provide such a service.

565 I now hand over the schedule with the financial information requested.

Answer to Question 505/2024

Financial Year	Total
2017/18	£6,120
2018/19	£4,505
2019/21	£9,791
2021/22	£20,995
2022/23	£5,270
2023/24	£3,789
2024/25	£17,145

Madam Speaker: Let's move on to the next question. The hon. Member can then ask supplementaries when she has had a chance to consider the schedule.

Q506/2024

**Three strikes system for taxi licensees –
Rollout**

Clerk: Question 506. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, by when does the Government expect to roll out the three strikes system to taxi licensees found liable for breaching their obligations under the transport legislation?

575 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the three strikes system is already in place, along with the increase in fines for those who breach their obligations. The Transport Commission will be the body that enforces the three-strike rule.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q507-08/2024

ConSen tunnel –

Plans; whether by tender process or private investment

Clerk: Question 507. The Hon. G Origo.

585 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, can the Government expand on what plans it has for the ConSen tunnel transport link and how it will ensure it will become a bona fide new tourist attraction?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 508.

Clerk: Question 508. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Will the Government be issuing a tender process for the proposed ComSen tunnel transport link project; and, if not, what private sector investors has it engaged instead?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, we are still in the preliminary stages of looking at options and are not able to comment further at this stage.

605 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Member for that answer, but may I just quickly ask – as I know that when announcing this project it was announced that it would be a transport tunnel link for bicycles – whether the Hon. Minister has considered whether pedestrians, cars and bikes will be allowed to go through the ComSen tunnel?

610 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, it is too early. We are looking at all the different stakeholders, all the different possibilities, but we have not gelled our plans in such a way that it would be helpful at all if I were to share any of the preliminary discussions that have been held.

615 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I appreciate that the Minister says they are at the preliminary stages, but as a matter of principle, once they conclude those discussions, the matter will go out to tender?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, would the hon. Member mind repeating the question? I did not catch it.

620 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, of course. We appreciate that the Minister has said that they are in the preliminary stages, but as a matter of principle, once those discussions are over will the project go out to tender?

625 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, it is too early to commit to that. We do not really know how viable the project is. It is really a little bit too early for me to share any further information.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, I understand the Minister's caveat as to the viability. I am asking him, if they were to determine that it is viable, would it go out for tender, or is it that they are proceeding on the basis that another option to see it to a conclusion is being considered?

630 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, we would have to look at a number of options. It is verging on the hypothetical.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q509-10/2024
Witham's Cemetery –
Restoration works; intention to open to the public

Clerk: Question 509. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide an update on the progress of the restoration works at Witham's Cemetery; and by when does he expect these works to finish?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 510.

Clerk: Question 510. The Hon. G Origo.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, is it still the Government's plan to open Witham's Cemetery to the public once the restoration works are complete?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate change.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, this project has been prepared, funded and executed by the Gibraltar Heritage Trust with the support of the Government but is not a Government project. However, I can report, in relation to Question 510, that the cemetery has been open to the public since June 2022 daily, from sunrise to sunset.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q511/2024
Dive operators –
Policy re regulation in BGTW

Clerk: Question 511. The Hon. G Origo.

660 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what is the Government's policy for regulating dive operators in Gibraltar territorial waters?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

665 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, Government's policy for regulating dive operators in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters is set out in the Marine Protection Regulations 2014 and is based on a permitting system. Clauses

29 to 32 of the aforementioned Regulations detail the provisions of the permitting system, otherwise known as a Class G permit.

670 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. In answer to last month's questions, in May, it was reported that 23 dive operator permits have been issued since 2014, yet zero penalties have been issued to date to operators for breaches of licence conditions. Zero permits have been revoked to date. So, may I ask the Hon. Minister who is responsible for carrying out the enforcement supervision of tour operators and whether he is
675 happy with their performance?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the enforcement team at the Department of the Environment, the Environmental Protection and Research Unit, is the entity that would enforce, as they will if there are any breaches that it is aware of.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q512/2024
Tuna fishing –
Policy re regulation in BGTW

Clerk: Question 512. The Hon. G Origo.

685 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what is the Government's policy for regulating tuna fishing in Gibraltar territorial waters?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

690 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Government's policy for regulating tuna fishing in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters is enshrined in the Tuna Preservation Regulations 2014. These Regulations cover the permitting system known as a Class K licence, including specific licence conditions, as well as the total allowable catch and open season restrictions.

695 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. May I just highlight, similarly to the point made on dive operators, that it is noted that in answers to last month's questions a total of 2,359 permits have been issued to date, since 2014, yet none of these have been revoked? A total of 17 penalties have been issued in 10 years. A further 42 confiscations of fish have happened since 2014; 64% of these happened in 2014 alone. So, may I ask the Hon.
700 Minister: have enforcement measures in this area been relaxed; and, if not, how does he explain the reduction in confiscations?

705 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Madam Speaker, quite the contrary. I think the fact that the enforcement was so strict in 2014 has meant that the tuna fishermen have realised that they cannot get away with what they used to get away with before we introduced the regulations in 2014. Hence the drop in these infractions. The tuna fishing fraternity in Gibraltar has become much more organised and much more regulated, and that is why we have seen that decrease that the hon. Member has pointed out.

710 **Hon. G Origo:** I am very grateful, Madam Speaker. If I may ask, finally: who, or what authority is responsible for carrying out the enforcement measures of the Government's policy in open waters?

715 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, once again, it is the Environmental Protection and Research Unit. Where there are instances of non-local fishermen – and there are implications as to whether we are on the edge of BGT or not on occasions – the Royal Gibraltar Police or Customs will assist, but that is not normally required.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q513-16/2024
Careers Advisory Service –
Plans; qualifications and experience of advisers and whether paid of voluntary;
availability to students abroad

720 **Clerk:** Question 513. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government expand on its plans for a school-based Careers Advisory Service for young people? For instance, what hours will the service be available and who will be providing these services?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 514 to 516.

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Clerk: Question 514. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: What qualifications and/or experience will those giving careers advice at the Careers Advisory Service be required to have?

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Clerk: Question 515 The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: How does the Government propose to make the Careers Advisory Service available to those youths studying abroad?

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Clerk: Question 516. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Will the Careers Advisory Service be a paid role or carried out as volunteer work?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

750 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this set of questions asks for details that have not yet been determined. I will, therefore, give a more general reply, referring in broader terms to careers advice policy, partly because the approach to careers advice has evolved and is much more holistic and strategic.

The Department of Education has been working on developing a more service-wide strategic approach to careers advice and future pathway guidance for the children and young people under

its care. This work has very much been school based and facilitated through the learning and teaching curriculum within schools. This more strategic approach has included dialogue across multiple educational settings and across numerous educational sectors. There has also been very fruitful engagement with colleagues in the Youth Service and professionals from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and emerging dialogue between the Department of Education and key representatives from numerous Government Departments and private sector industries, in order to further develop the strategic approach to developing skills, identifying competencies and appropriate qualifications and/or pathways which align with careers and with industry preferences or requirements.

Whereas this consistent effort is of more long-term value than singular events, the latter are helpful also. There has been some incredibly successful partnership working with a fantastic Future Pathways event, providing year 12 students with an opportunity to attend workshops, engage directly with professionals from a large number of different fields within industry, develop their CV-writing skills and acquire relevant current knowledge which will enable them to make more informed decisions about their future. The Government is also currently working on reintroducing a careers fair.

The Department of Education is actively working to develop a more strategic approach and age-appropriate guidance for younger learners, with plans to extend the career and future pathway focus within the learning and teaching curriculum to pupils in Key Stages 4, 3 and below, further developing the service-wide strategic approach to pupils' life journeys, skill development, self-awareness and career direction.

At present, there are no plans to extend this service to young people at university. Universities have career services which can better provide their students with bespoke advice and guidance. The Department of Education's career advice focus is very much school based and intrinsically linked with the Department of Education's vision for education, which is to develop children and young people holistically, in a manner which focuses on their skills development and which helps them contribute to society positively in meaningful and fulfilling ways.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am very grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. However, may I just press him for a clarification on one of the points he has just made? I noted, whilst listening to his answer, that he did mention that the Careers Advisory Service, when it is developed, will not be extended to university students. However, referring to their manifesto, at page 121, in the part which deals with the Careers Advisory Service, it reads:

In order to assist these, both those young people who want to pursue higher education and those who will seek employment, we will set up a schools based careers advisory service. This will be extended to providing advice to Gibraltar students studying abroad.

So, I would ask the Hon. Minister to clarify the comment he has just made, that the Careers Advisory Service will not be extended to University, with the manifesto commitment that was given by his party.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, I qualified that paragraph with 'at present' there are no plans. To a large extent, clearly, if young people at university come to the Department of Education for advice, they will get it, but it is true that universities have more specialised and focused advice available to students within their particular university. I did qualify with 'at present'. As I said at the beginning, we have not yet determined the detail of the careers service. It is not that we are going to exclude it completely, but at present we have not developed it.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Just to pull the thread from that, at present there are no plans but in October 2023 there were plans. Is that the case?

800 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Madam Speaker, we have the whole lifetime of this Parliament to develop. Those are the intentions, and I am talking specifically about workstreams which have not yet developed those plans.

805 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I think my hon. colleague was asking specifically about the paragraph in the manifesto, and the Hon. Minister responded that at present there were no plans. I was seeking to clarify that surely the position must be that at present there are plans. The plans are in the manifesto. It cannot be that there are no plans.

810 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** No, Madam Speaker, at present there are plans that there will be plans.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Reyes had a question.

815 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I may home in more specifically on Question 515, the Minister said that for those students studying abroad ... and I concur with the analysis that there are careers advisory services available in some universities, but being more home related, can the Minister confirm that he, somehow or other, has some dialogue with the Minister for Employment? If I can give you an example, having been a university student, I may get general information on something, but I know that in respect of accountants – who are like
820 Marmite, you either like them or you hate them – there seems to be a shortage in Gibraltar, where we have to import accountants. We have accountants who are Members of this House who would gladly offer career advice to anyone wishing to take it. Can we have some confirmation that there is some sort of rapport and interchange of ideas for the future needs of Gibraltar, specifically the Minister for Employment and even with the Minister for Economic Development, who has
825 fantastic ideas for the future, but someone has to listen to him?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I am going to address both. The advice to university students is available in universities. We intend to provide that here, but at present we are planning it; we have not developed that yet. The more urgent thing is to help those young people within
830 our education system now, and I have expounded all the work that is being done with industry, with different sectors, within our schools, to provide careers advice in a holistic kind of way.

Having dealt with that, there is a lot of close co-operation with my friend and colleague the Minister for Employment and Training. We have held meetings together and there are workstreams which will assist in the very joined-up manner that the hon. Member is hoping is
835 happening. Madam Speaker, it is happening.

Madam Speaker: Yes.

840 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Plans to plan, and lots of words, Madam Speaker. There is one specific question which was posed by my friend here, Question 516, which related to whether the Careers Advisory Service would be a paid role. He says that he is not yet in a position to provide the answers to that question because the service has not yet been formulated; the position is not so crystallised to allow the Hon. the Minister to provide an answer. Can I, therefore, ask him when he thinks he will be in a position to provide answers to these specific questions, which remain
845 unanswered?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, within the lifetime of this Parliament.

Q505/2024

**Accessible equipment for persons with disabilities on beaches –
Contract for maintenance –
Supplementary questions**

Madam Speaker: Before we move on to the next question, I am going to revert to Question 505. Are there any supplementaries arising from that?

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Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, in relation to the Mobility Care Centre, I believe the hon. Member said was the name of the company, just to understand it a bit better, the hon. Member is saying that the Government subcontracts the company in the event of repairs but the Government has not entered a contract with the company for the maintenance of the accessibility equipment – is that correct?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, there is no contract as such, but there is engagement with that entity. They provide equipment and they repair and maintain it on an as-needs basis. The costs are in the schedule that I provided.

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Hon. A Sanchez: But can the Hon. Minister confirm whether the Government is in any form of service agreement with the Mobility Care Centre for services provided by this company, either these services or similar services?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there is an arrangement with the entity. I do not have the full details of what that is. It was something that was inherited by the Department of Environment in 2017 from the Care Agency. As I said, it is an arrangement whereby the repairs are carried out on an as-needs basis, depending on what the equipment needs in any particular year.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I think, Madam Speaker, we had a similar issue arising in the context of the Care Agency about two sessions ago. As I understand it, from what the Hon. the Minister is telling us, there is, in effect, an agreement, a contract legally, and he says that he does not have the information. Should we ask specific questions in relation to that next time? The Hon. the Minister would be in a position to provide specific answers in relation to what those arrangements are. But may I ask him this: is it the intention of the Minister to enter into a formal contract with this particular service provider, or indeed to open it out for tender, which is what his hon. Friend in the Care Agency is doing in respect of respite services?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the arrangement is working well. I will consult the Department to see how they feel about that. I think it is important that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. We have had very positive comments this year on the service that has been provided, but I will discuss with the Members of the Department who deal with this on a day-to-day basis, to see whether we need to change the way we approach this.

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Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Looking at the schedule that the Minister kindly passed round, these are the actual costs incurred, as and when the need arose, for the works to be carried out. I see that in the last one, referring to 2024-25, I presume – I hope I am right that that is for the financial year that commenced on 1st April – in less than three months, is it correct that we have already spent over £17,000, and that just covers the first quarter of this financial

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year? Can I have confirmation? And, if so, why such a huge expense compared to the two previous years?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: There is a very easy reason: we have to spend the money before the beach season starts, so we have to spend it early in the financial year to make sure that the equipment is ready for the beach. Other than repairs that may be necessary during the summer, we do not expect there to be much expenditure after that.

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I know for a fact that this year, because one young person has grown we had to specifically buy some other facilities to accommodate the growth of this young person, and that took quite a chunk out of the funds, but you would expect to have the expenditure loaded towards the beginning of the financial year because it is something that has to be ready for the summer.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Madam Speaker, one can understand that the bulk of the expenditure will come in the first quarter of the financial year, but the second part of my supplementary question was why such a huge difference compared to 2023-24 to 2022-23? Forget 2017, just look at the last three years: it has tripled, quadrupled, compared to last year or the year before. Some mysterious or unknown expenditure has been incurred.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, but Madam Speaker, 2021-22 was a higher expenditure. I suspect – and I do not have that information here – that the equipment will have a certain lifespan and that after a certain number of years you will have to replace the bulk of it, but I do not have the breakdown, item by item, of when and where it has been purchased. If the hon. Member wants me to go into that detail, I can obtain it, but I do not think it is particularly useful or relevant. I can imagine that this is probably cyclical.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I thank the Hon. Minister for his offer. Yes, I would like to have the detail. I have sat on that side of the House and when I look at the answers from statistics prepared for me by officials, it sticks out like a sore thumb. I ask for details because I suspect, in all probability, I will get questioned on it. I am grateful that the Minister is willing to undertake that and provide us with the further details. Thank you.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q517-18/2024

Teachers –

Number retiring; anticipated number of new teachers

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Clerk: Question 517. The Hon. J. Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: How many teachers are retiring at the end of this current academic year?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 518.

Clerk: Question 518. The Hon. E J Reyes.

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Hon. E J Reyes: How many new teachers are envisaged to be contracted on a substantive basis as from the start of the 2024-25 academic year?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there are no teachers retiring actually at the end of this academic year. However, as at projected figures now, there are 5 teachers retiring at the very beginning of the next academic year. For all intents and purposes, I think that is the information that the hon. Member requested.

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In answer to Question 518, there are 14 permanent teacher vacancies available.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I can understand, in the answer to Question 517, that there is a specific reason why many teachers put down a retirement date of 1st September rather than 31st August: it does have a small adjustment on their pension for those still on a pension scheme based on their present salary. I am glad to note that if the permanent complement loses five for retirement, those numbers are then being increased to 14. Can I ask for further confirmation? Is it because there has been an increase in number, or is it because there were other vacancies that were being covered during the last year by those on the supply list? I know the Minister has worked very hard to make sure that vacant posts are covered, even if it is just by temporary cover, but at least physically there is a qualified teacher in the classroom. Can he confirm which one it is?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, that is due to retirements during the course of the year. There are 5 in respect of the first question, but there are another 9 who have gone during the course of the year, and therefore it is 14 that are vacant by the start of the next academic year.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q519/2024

School TLR posts –

Results of review and number of unfilled posts

Clerk: Question 519. The Hon. E J Reyes.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Has the Department of Education now completed its review of TLR posts at all schools, and how many TLR posts are still not filled on a substantive basis?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the Department of Education has been progressing the review of the TLR posts that had been pending. 8 of the posts that were previously pending, and had been for a number of years, have now been clarified and have already been recruited for, with the successful applicants expected to take up their appointments in September 2024. 14 of the pending posts are under the final stages of review, with discussions with staff members and the union expected to be completed in term 1 of academic year 2024-25. A further five pending posts are College TLR positions which still require further consideration.

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In total there are currently 38 TLR posts not filled in a substantive capacity: (a) the 19 pending TLRs mentioned above; (b) a further 16, which have already been recruited for and will be filled

980 in a substantive capacity by September 2024; (c) and a further 3 which will imminently be advertised.

Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful and I note satisfaction with the fair amount of progress that has been made. Just on the last one, we have 16 that will be taken up as from 1st September, but the others that he hopes to advertise shortly – is the Minister able to commit that he will do his utmost that, at least within the first term of the forthcoming academic year, those will be settled?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, when I say imminently, I think it is within the next few days. The intention is to recruit them and identify them before the beginning of the term in September.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q520-22/2024

Hair and Beauty vocational courses at Bayside and Westside Schools and the College – Numbers of students involved, grades achieved and costs

Clerk: Question 520. The Hon. E J Reyes.

995 **Hon. E J Reyes:** What results or grades were obtained by students who followed the Hair and Beauty course at both Bayside and Westside Schools during the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 521 and 522.

Clerk: Question 521. The Hon. J. Reyes.

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Hon. E J Reyes: What is the total cost in respect of the Hair and Beauty vocational courses delivered at Bayside and Westside Schools during the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24, and how many students were enrolled and completed these courses?

1010 **Clerk:** Question 522. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: What is the total cost in respect of the Certificate in Hairdressing vocational courses delivered by the Gibraltar College of Further Education during the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24, how many students were enrolled and completed these courses and what results grades were achieved by students?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the results/grades of pupils who completed the Hair and Beauty Course at both Bayside and Westside Schools in academic year 2022-23 are in the public domain, as they were reported through a government press release in August 2023. The results/grades of pupils who have completed the Hair and Beauty course at both Bayside and

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Westside Schools in academic year 2023-24 are not yet known. These pupils completed the work this summer and are now awaiting their results. Results are expected in August 2024.

1025 In answer to Question 521, the total cost in respect of the Hair and Beauty vocational courses delivered at Bayside and Westside Schools during academic year 2022-23 has already been presented to Parliament in answer to Question 558/23. To date, the total cost of the Hair and Beauty vocational courses delivered at Bayside and Westside Schools during the academic year 1030 2023-24 is £32,968.71. These courses are two-year courses delivered at Key Stage 4 level, during young people's year 10 and year 11 journey. As such, there are two cohorts within each academic year stated within the question, one cohort commencing the course in year 10, and another cohort completing the two-year qualification over the course of year 11.

1035 I now hand over a schedule which details the number of pupils who enrolled in each cohort at the start of year 10, and also the number of pupils who completed the course at the end of the two years.

Answer to Question 521/2024

	Year 11 Cohort	Year 10 Cohort
This academic year 2023/2024	Bayside	Bayside
	12 students completed the course Westside Group B	5 students enrolled on the course Westside
	6 students completed the course	7 students enrolled on the course
Last academic year 2022/2023	Bayside	Bayside
	4 students completed the course Westside Group A	14 students enrolled on the course Westside
	4 students completed the course	7 students enrolled on the course

1040 In answer to Question 522, which is the one relating to the College, the total cost in respect of the Certificate in Hairdressing vocational courses delivered by the Gibraltar College during academic year 2022-23 has already been presented to Parliament in answer to Question 558/23. The total cost of the Certificate in Hairdressing vocational courses delivered by the Gibraltar College during academic year 2023-24 is nil, as no students enrolled on this course in September 1045 2023. This qualification is a one-year course. There were four students who enrolled on the course at the start of the academic year 2022-23. Three students completed the course in the summer of 2023, with two achieving merit results, and a third, who initially was awarded a fail outcome, subsequently passing the course with a merit at the next earliest opportunity. There have not been any students enrolled on this course during the academic year 2023-24.

Hon. E J Reyes: First of all, Madam Speaker, is there a particular reason why no students have been enrolled on the 2023-24 course? Is it because of the cost?

1050 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member is referring to Question 522?

Hon. E J Reyes: Sorry, Madam Speaker, yes, I am referring to the last answer the Minister gave me. He said there were no new students enrolled on the 2023-24 course. Is it because there were no takers or because the course was not offered?

1055 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I do not know whether they are mutually exclusive. There were no takers.
The reasons could be several, many or none in particular. What I can say is that it is expected that
there will be young people enrolled this year on that course, because there are some in Bayside
and Westside doing their level, which is really a precursor to the College, who are doing very well
and seem to be very keen. So, I think this year we will be able to enrol some students, but the
1060 decision will depend on the results this year as to whether they take the course next year.

Hon. E J Reyes: I understand the decisions cannot be taken before.

Madam Speaker, going to Question 520, which was the first one from this particular batch, the
results and grades obtained by students. It is understandable for those following the course in
1065 2023-24 that results normally come in August, so those are not yet available, but were there no
the statistics? Did no one undertake any examinations during the academic year 2022-23, or is
that the date when the course started and therefore all the students were then in year 10? I need
clarification because of my confusion.

1070 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, what I said is that those results are public. They were
issued in a government press release in August 2023.

Hon. E J Reyes: The Minister referred me to Question 558/2023. That is in respect of the cost.
I did not get any details, or perhaps I did not make a note, of where exactly I may find the
1075 examination results – a detailed breakdown, how many of any particular grade or if indeed,
unfortunately, there were any ... or whatever for the 2022-23 course.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: The government press release that is issued every August with the results
of the examinations.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Can he pinpoint the press release number?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I cannot. It is in the public domain; I am sure he could
Google it right now. This information will follow, but it is there, it is in the public domain. He could
1085 have ...

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I accept I can Google it. If he does not have it, he does not
have it; I will have to lump it.

1090 **Madam Speaker:** Any other supplementaries? Next question

Q523/2024
Campion Park play area –
Wood chippings

Clerk: 523. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, is the Government aware of concerns expressed by parents
and users in respect of the wood chippings at Campion Park play areas, which are covered in filth
1095 and dust, and what remedial action has been planned?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1100 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the bark chippings that we use for the play area – singular, not plural as in the question; there is one play area – are of a specification recommended by the designers of the park, who contracted children’s play park specialists to advise on all aspects of the park design, including the type of substrate used. An independent professional on health and safety in children’s parks was also engaged to sign off on all aspects of the play park, and training was provided to staff in addition. The bark typically produces less dust than would, for example, a sand or soil substrate, 1105 but it does degrade and is therefore monitored and replenished when necessary. When it is nearing the end of its cycle, it tends to produce more dust, but we reject the term ‘filth’, the *Oxford Dictionary* definition of which is ‘any very dirty and unpleasant substance’, which is completely inappropriate for a natural and harmless material such as bark. The plan is, of course, to replenish the bark chippings as usual.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My opening words in the question are ‘Is the Government aware ...?’ The Minister has not told me if has been aware or if it had been reported to him. Was he aware, or not?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I was aware from the question but we have had no complaints or representations, because this is the normal cycle and after a certain period of time the chippings are replaced as per the specifications and recommendations of the experts.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, I accept that, Madam Speaker. If, in the future, any parents wish to express concerns, can the Hon. Minister advise these parents how they can make him aware of the situation?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as I shared with the whole of the community during the last *Direct Democracy* – perhaps too often for the hon. Gentleman’s comfort – john.cortes@gibraltar.gov.gi.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q524/2024
Levant Battery 9.2-inch gun –
Plans

Clerk: Question 524. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C A Sacarello: What are the plans for the Levant Battery 9.2-inch gun, once destined to be displayed at Europa Point?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, after 50 years of neglect, this Government, in collaboration with several key entities, successfully removed the 9.2-inch gun barrel, carriage and pedestal from the Metalrok Eco Park on Flint Road. Our preferred option is to return it to its original site at Levant Battery, although

1140 logistical challenges and road weight restrictions are making this difficult due to its weight. However, this remains the preferred location.

1145 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the Minister for his reply. Could he please inform us why the destination has been changed from Europa Point back to Levant Battery?

1150 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, because in Europa Point it would be outside its historical context. That gun was never there. It is a massive gun, which would change the nature of Europa Point; it is not in context. Increasingly when you restore heritage, one wants to put it in its original context, so we are still looking at Levant Battery as the logical place to return it to. If that appears to be completely impossible – I am not convinced it is completely impossible, and we are looking at various options – then we would have to look at an alternative position, if indeed we want to mount it and replace it. But at this point in time, Levant Battery is where the Levant Battery gun should ideally go.

1155 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** And does the Hon. Minister have a timeframe as to when it will be decided whether it is surmountable or not?

1160 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Within the lifetime of this Parliament, Madam Speaker, but just to add that we are in contact with a UK entity which specialises in this sort of restoration, and hopefully they will come up with a scheme.

1165 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** And can the hon. Member confirm whether the carriage and pedestal to which he referred will also be preserved? At one point it was mooted that they may be split up, but obviously these, being a rarity, would deserve to be preserved.

1170 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, if we are able to get it back to Levant Battery, the whole gun will be mounted. If not, then we have to see what visual impact there would be as to whether the barrel would be displayed. But, for the moment, the intention is to keep it all together and to put it back there. If it appears that that is completely impossible ... It was taken away, so in theory it could be taken back, but we are looking at the logistics of it. It is not easy; it is complicated.

1175 **Hon. D J Bossino:** But may I ask the Hon. the Minister why has it taken them so long? I cannot remember the exact date, and it will be in the public domain, but as things stand, the 9.2 gun was removed from the scrapyard in Devil's Tower Road to a scrapyard in Europa Point. Is that the sum total of progress as far as this Government is concerned? May I ask him what has taken them so long to now decide to even change the location of it?

1180 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, that which the hon. Gentleman has described sounds to me like a whole lot more progress than when they were in government, which was that the gun that he is referring to was at the same scrapheap for 16 years. I think that the Hon. Minister has today told the House of much more considerable progress than hon. Members can point to in the time that they were in office. Therefore, we are very satisfied that we are making much more progress than we made in the time that they were in office.

1185 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Much more progress? This is total lack of planning. Will he not agree with me that it has gone from scrapyard A to scrapyard B and nothing has happened? He says that they are now thinking of changing the location from Europa Point to the Levant Battery. How much is that going to cost the taxpayer? Does he have that information, or does he not have that information? Again, it is going to be another feature of lack of planning on their part.

1190 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I know that the hon. Gentleman wants to create a sense
of outrage in everything that he does. In that case, (**Hon. D J Bossino:** Outrageous.) I would have
thought that it was –

Madam Speaker: Would the hon. Member not comment from a sedentary position?

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Hon. Chief Minister: – perhaps not the choicest question for him to choose, because, of course,
as the hon. Member has said, we have not just moved the gun from where it was totally
abandoned in their time, in the context of the most abject lack of planning to plan anything to do
with the gun, we have actually moved it, treated it, and are now considering where to put it, which
1200 I would have thought, even in the context of the hon. Gentleman's ability to understand things
and give credit to the Government, is demonstrably much more planning and doing than
happened when they were last in government.

Just to assist the hon. Gentleman to focus on what he is saying, for the 16 years that they were
in government – that is to say for the over 4,000 days that they were in government – the gun lay
1205 where it was, unmoved and unthought of each day. In the time that we have been in government,
the gun has been moved from where it was to a different place, it is being treated, the plans are
being developed in order to put it in the right place, to show it off and to demonstrate that
investment in our heritage that we are known for.

Madam Speaker, happily, the hon. Gentleman never takes my advice – if he had, he might have
1210 progressed a little more in his political career – but I shall tell him at least this: on this one, he has
really shot his load.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, it is absolutely bizarre to hear the Hon. the Chief Minister
answer in the way he has. There is nothing in what he has said today in answer to my question
1215 which moves away from the basic criticism, which is that it has moved from one scrapyard to
another scrapyard and equally lay abandoned there since it was last moved. The criticism still
remains that there is a lack of planning. Furthermore – and this is why I rise – apart from all the
fluff that he has mentioned about me and my political career, which is absolutely irrelevant to the
question that I posed, they have failed to answer one basic question: does the Hon. the Minister
1220 have any idea of cost to move the 9.2 gun to the Levant Battery? What are we talking about here,
in terms of cost?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, that did not seem to me to be the question that
the hon. Gentleman wanted answered. It seemed to me that the hon. Gentleman found, after I
1225 replied to him, that he had actually put his gun on a carriage and taken it down the wrong one-
way road into a cul-de-sac, from which even he, with his mock outrage, could not find a way out.

Perhaps I was too quick in the way that I explained it, and he did not quite understand it. It is
not a fair criticism of the Government that has taken the step of taking the gun from the scrapyard
in which they left it, treated it and prepared it for a new emplacement – either one or the other,
1230 the original one or an alternative – for that to be said by the representatives of the Government
that did nothing about the same gun: *nothing*, absolutely zero. They did not consider whether it
should be moved. They did not, I think, even know that it was there. This is something that comes
from the time when we were in opposition. We were approached about the gun. We worked with
the private sector to look at how we could go about moving the gun. The private sector
1235 contributed to the movement of the gun. It is a complex thing because of the size of the gun. It
has not cost us anything to date and it very likely will cost us nothing going forward.

So, there has been no failure of action on our part, but there was on theirs. There has been no
cost to us to date, and there is likely to be no cost going forward. In light of that, the hon.
Gentleman can get up and, with his mock outrage, sound outrageous again about everything
1240 which is outrageous about the questions that he is asking, but actually, really, do we want to spend

any further time listening to the hon. Gentleman labour the point, which actually is that we did something about it and they did not? I wager we do not, Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker –

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Madam Speaker: Your question has been answered on cost. Is there a new supplementary?

Hon. D J Bossino: Could I invite the Hon. the Chief Minister, by way of a point of order, to withdraw the reference that he made, that I had shot my load, which I think is a reference which I would rather not go into but I think is an unparliamentary use of language. I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman knows what the slang version of that is, and I would invite him to do so. The outrage which is being prompted on my side is not the issue at hand but the way that the Hon. the Chief Minister is answering these questions. That is what is causing me outrage.

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Madam Speaker: I am not aware of the slang either, but I will look into it, and then, if necessary, I will rule as to whether it is unparliamentary language or not. I am happy to admit my ignorance on that. I do not know if the Hon. the Chief Minister wants to reply before I rule at a later time.

1255

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I actually understood ‘shot my load’ to mean when one loads a cartridge of shot into a gun for shooting birds, but I have now looked it up and the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there is a vernacular, alternative meaning, which was not anywhere near my mind but was obviously the first one to come to his. So, I fully and completely apologise to all those who believed that I was making a vernacular reference when the reference I was making was to the shot used when one goes shooting, which is not a pastime I have ever indulged in but is a phrase that I know from literature rather than anything else. I do acknowledge that it is also a vernacular and rude expression, which is not what I intended but obviously the one that first came to his mind.

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Madam Speaker: I think that deals with the point of order. I shall check it myself in any event, because now my curiosity is aroused.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if I might suggest that you should have someone check it for you rather than have it on your search engine, if I may put it that way – and ITLD should know that it is on my search engine only for these parliamentary purposes.

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Madam Speaker: Well, maybe I will not search for it at all, then; I will just take your word for it.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Finally, on the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, I really do not accept the chronology of what he said. We now have a video of this. I got up and referred to his mock outrage only after his mock outrage, so his mock outrage –

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Madam Speaker: I believe we have dealt with this issue. I am not going to labour it any longer. I will ask the hon. Gentleman to take a seat.

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A new supplementary on this? Yes. The Hon. Mr Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I address this question specifically to the Minister for Heritage, just for the Minister to clarify, for the purpose of *Hansard*, that this barrel was, in fact, originally removed by the Royal Engineers back in 1972 for scrapping by them, and not by any Government of Gibraltar.

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1295 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I believe it was removed by ... I cannot say I believe because I do not know, but I suspect it would have been removed by the Ministry of Defence. Where they took it to, I do not know. That, as the Chief Minister has said, it had been languishing in what is really a scrapyards, unlooked-after and degenerating for many years is nevertheless a fact, regardless of who took it there.

1300 **Madam Speaker:** Next question – We have exhausted this question. Did you want to ask something on another question?

Hon. E J Reyes: At a convenient moment for you, Madam Speaker, referring back to the schedule that the Minister for Education gave me.

1305 **Madam Speaker:** All right. I will allow the Hon. Mr Reyes to ask any supplementaries on Question 522.

Q522/2024

Hair and Beauty vocational courses – Supplementary questions

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is referring back to the schedule that the Minister for Education gave me.

1310 **Madam Speaker:** I will allow the Hon. Mr Reyes to ask any supplementaries on Question 522.

1315 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is a very short clarification I am seeking. The schedule where he provides me with the details of the answer to Question 521 lists that in the academic year 2022-23, the year 11 cohort – those are the students who undertook the examinations in the summer of 2023 – four students completed the course at Bayside and four at Westside. Referring to the press release that I was advised to look at, I see that from Bayside School four students ended up with ungraded results, in Westside School there was one merit and three ended up with ungraded results, but the Minister made a reference that I think upon appeal – is it upon appeal or is it upon a resit? – one of those students was able to alter their grade. I am sorry, but I seek the clarification so that ... Seven students failing out of a cohort of eight looks bad, but perhaps it is not as bad, if the Minister is able to clarify.

1325 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Well, yes, Madam Speaker, students do fail, or fail to pass. But my reference to a resit – it was in fact a resit – was in relation to the College.

Hon. E J Reyes: And which entity – was it from the Bayside or Westside School group – managed to be successful upon resit in the subsequent year?

1330 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** The resit was a student from the College, who failed their one-year course and who got a merit on resit a few months later.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q525/2024
O'Hara's Battery –
Provision of water and drainage

Clerk: Question 525. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1335 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Will the ongoing restoration works at O'Hara's Battery include the provision of water and drainage to the site?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1340 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, current restoration works done at O'Hara's Battery are solely on military artefacts and the general upkeep of the site as a military battery. The provision of water and drainage would not form part of these restoration works, except for the drainage of rainwater from the battery itself.

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Hon. C A Sacarello: Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the hon. Member for his reply. Would he not agree that it would make sense to upgrade this facility with a simple introduction of water and drainage, which would benefit locals and tourists, would help with cleaning and maintenance, and also assist in any fire prevention measures?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it would if it were simple, but water on the Upper Rock is not simple. It is an old MoD system which relies on gravity from the header tank right at the very top of Breakneck Battery. The whole system is currently under review jointly between the MoD and AquaGib. So, getting running water up to that site is not simple, due to the location and the difficulty with water pressure so high up on the Rock.

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Hon. C A Sacarello: Madam Speaker, man managed to put a man on the moon: where there is a will, there is a way. Just because things are difficult or awkward or do not necessarily run with gravity is not necessarily a reason for ... Is the Government's commitment, or rather, lack of commitment to do so, driven by financial restrictions?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, it is not a lack of commitment at all. I have held several meetings now with the Ministry of Defence – whose system it is and who obviously have an interest in the work – and with AquaGib in order to see what needs to be done, but it will be a complicated and expensive task to provide water under pressure to the very top of the Rock. Clearly the Government has to take a view when those costs are determined, and they would have to be determined jointly with the Ministry of Defence. That is where we are going, but we do not have that information yet.

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Hon. C A Sacarello: So, will the Government not commit to putting water up there, particularly given the number of tourists and locals that use the Med Steps, for example, and may be caught short at that location?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, once again, I have to almost refer back to the scrapyard argument. Water to the top of the Rock has been a problem. It is now a matter that we are trying to address. Of course we want to improve the water supply to the Upper Rock. We are addressing it, but as I have said, it is not simple.

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1380 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Hon. Minister has explained that it is an MoD system, and presumably
the MoD are still responsible for the infrastructure, but do I take it from his answer, given how he
has explained it and how they have to assess the cost jointly and so on, that if there are then
additions to what is an MoD system, that cost would be borne by whoever wants to pursue that
addition. Hence the involvement of AquaGib and so on.

1385 He gave us a reference point of the tank being at Breakneck Battery. I am afraid I am not
familiar with where Breakneck Battery is. Can he give us a bit more information on that, so as to
understand? It would really be connecting Breakneck Battery to O'Hara's, presumably?

1390 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Breakneck Battery is the highest point on the Rock. It is slightly to the
north of O'Hara's Battery, at the top of Mediterranean Steps. It is still an MoD site. That is where
it is. It is the highest point. That is where the header tank is, but it has to supply the whole of the
Upper Rock and it is a gravity feed. In order to supply it under pressure, there would have to be a
pumping system – hence the involvement of AquaGib – and obviously it gets complicated. It is a
discussion that is being had at the moment, Madam Speaker.

1395 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q526/2024
Frontier pelican crossing –
Replacement with normal crossing

Clerk: Question 526. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1400 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Why was the pelican crossing by the Customs post at the land Frontier
replaced with a normal crossing?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1405 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
Speaker, the entire area and road layout at the Frontier was adapted to allow for the opening of
Kingsway back in March 2023. There is adequate signage and visibility and, to our knowledge, it is
working without any issues since its implementation 14 months ago. The said road layouts are
temporary and will be redesigned and implemented as necessary to suit any reconfigurations
required as a result of the treaty negotiations or no negotiated outcome, so it would not be
justified to use public funds to install new infrastructure and then remove it after a few months.
1410 The redesign will include pedestrian light-controlled crossings, as well as safe routes for cyclists
and e-scooters to access the Frontier loop and beyond.

1415 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I may ask the Hon. Minister, why the removal in the first place? He has said
that there was a reconfiguration, in effect, as a result of the new tunnel, but why was it removed?
The reason why I have raised it is because I have been approached in relation to this, and I am told
that it is causing havoc for vehicular traffic because it is widely and excessively used by tourists
and other members of the public, which is not necessarily a bad thing because it shows that people
are still coming in their numbers, and obviously commuters as well. The point that was made to
me is why was it removed in the first place, and I am not sure that the explanation that the hon.
1420 Member has given, which is that it was part of a reconfiguration as a result of the tunnel works,
assists in understanding.

1425 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the detailed discussions at the time I would not be familiar with, as this was done back in March 2023, before I had responsibility for transport. I hesitate to repeat my email yet again. I have not received any representations, and certainly when the team looked at the question and prepared the answer, they were not of the opinion that it was creating any havoc, as the hon. Member has explained, but I will put it back to them and see what they come up with.

1430 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Something I detect from his response is that he is – and I would ask him to confirm – open to the possibility of a reintroduction of the pelican crossing, I suppose subject to infrastructural and cost considerations, but it is something that the Hon. Minister would be open to consider?

1435 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, provided that the Traffic Commission, which will have to consider it, as I said earlier, makes a recommendation to the effect.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q527/2024

Bicycles in pedestrianised areas – Measures to prevent inappropriate and inconsiderate use

1440 **Clerk:** Question 527. The Hon. DJ Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What measures, if any, are being introduced to prevent the inappropriate and inconsiderate use of bicycles in pedestrianised areas?

1445 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, it is for the Police to apply the appropriate enforcement, as with all traffic offences. The Ministry, however, is actively looking into other methods, such as the use of CCTV and body cameras.

1450 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Minister is absolutely right, as far as the first limb of his answer is concerned. In relation to the second limb of his answer, when does he expect to be introducing these measures? I think those would be very useful tools which would then be available to the Police to enforce the laws in relation to this issue.

1455 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, hopefully after we have funds voted by Parliament at the forthcoming session.

1460 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask the Hon. the Minister to perhaps go back to his original reply? As I understood it, what his Department is considering is the introduction of CCTV cameras. Did he also make a reference to body cameras? Presumably that would be for the relevant police officers to wear. Is that the case?

1465 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Police officers, although that obviously is their decision, but also the traffic wardens.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has a supplementary?

1470 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, only to understand that, because obviously the Police already wear
body cameras in accordance with their roles under the criminal legislation but if there are going
to be body cameras worn by enforcement officers under a different guise, not under the criminal
legislation, is the Government intending legislation regulating the use of that material?

1475 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I said we are looking into it, and obviously, if the
decision is taken that that would assist and it needs legislation, we would have to bring legislation,
absolutely. We could not just do it, if the law does not cover that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q528/2024
Speeding at Line Wall Road –
Measures to curtail

1480 **Clerk:** Question 528. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the Government have any plans to curtail speeding at Line Wall Road?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1485 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
Speaker, there are no immediate plans to introduce further speed calming measures on Line Wall
Road. This road currently has a 30 kmph limit and is actively patrolled and enforced by the RGP
with mobile speed radars.

1490 **Hon. D J Bossino:** When the Hon. the Minister refers to no current plans, that would be
suggestive, in my view, that he would also be open to consideration of the introduction of speed
calming measures, which is one of the ways of preventing what, according to one particular
correspondent in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* on more than one occasion, where he has said – I do not
want to mention a name – that this is a cause for concern. I think this particular individual is aware
1495 of this because he works in that area. The hon. Member refers to the Police enforcing the laws
and all the rest of it, but clearly something is missing and something else needs to be done. It may
not necessarily be calming measures, it may be something else, but I ask him whether it is
something that he would be considering doing in the future, or is he going to leave the status quo
as it is because, as far as he is concerned, he does not think that there is an issue of speeding in
1500 Line Wall Road?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, perhaps we would solve the problem if we
pedestrianise it.

1505 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I have raised a serious point, and it is a matter of serious concern to not just
this individual, but to others. I personally do not have that direct experience, but I am told by
people who live and work there that there is an issue. With the greatest of respect to him – I know
he is rather glib in his reply and probably trying to be funny, in my view unsuccessfully – can I ask
the Hon. the Minister to answer my question, which is would he be willing to consider alternative
1510 measures, or is it his position and the position of the Government that there is not an issue here?

In other words, the complaints have not been brought to his attention, so there is no problem of speeding on Line Wall Road.

1515 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the speed limit is 30 kmph. People may fail to keep to that speed limit and that is obviously something which we do not condone, but I must refer the hon. Member to the original answer that I gave.

1520 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The hon. Member is not answering the supplementary question I am asking of him. Is it something that he is willing to consider by way of further measures, or – and I need to press him on this – is it his or indeed the Government’s position that as far as they are concerned, there is not an issue, the speed limits are there, the Police are there to do their job? Another question would be for the Minister for Justice to answer whether the Police are sufficiently resourced, by way of human resources or money, to carry out the enforcement. That is a separate question. But is it that his view is that nothing else needs to be done?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, this is a matter for the Traffic Commission, and I will ensure that the Traffic Commission considers this.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Sacarello.

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1535 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. If I may just drill down specifically to the end of Line Wall Road, to where the top end of the taxi ramp meets the popular, although not official, crossing to the other side of Line Wall Road, where the youth centre used to be and there is now a nursery: in the interests of pedestrian safety, would it not make sense for the Minister to advise his Department to consider implementing a zebra crossing or some other form of pedestrian crossing at that particular point?

1540 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is a world-renowned expert on the flight of birds, he is a botanist, he is referred to as a professor in many regards; the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano is a well-known economist; Mr Feetham leads in the field of insurance; Ms Orfila has led in education; Gemma Arias-Vasquez is a well-known lawyer; and we have, luckily, somebody who could save our lives here and a historian whose history of Gibraltar, especially its socialist liberal Government in the second decade of the third millennium, will be the authoritative piece in respect of that when it is written. But I, unfortunately, and none of the others who might grace these tables are experts in traffic. Luckily, we are blessed with eight experts in traffic
1545 opposite. They should feel free to raise matters with our experts in traffic, who are the Traffic Commission, who will gratefully receive any correspondence they wish to address to them. We can all give opinions about zebra crossings, pelican crossings, speed etc., but we are not experts, and so all we are doing is dizzying the pheasant by speaking constantly about issues on which we
1550 are not experts. If there is an issue, then address it to the experts in the Traffic Commission and they will respond. But to simply be, across the floor of the House, talking about these things when none of us are expert on it, I think makes little sense, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Sacarello, one more.

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1560 **Hon. C A Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I do need to come back to that, because on this issue I think the Hon. the Chief Minister is belittling the seriousness of the situation, particularly when there are mothers with babies crossing the road. I do not think it is a laughing matter, a joking matter. All I asked was that they give serious consideration to my request; it did not warrant that response. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Your question?

1565 **Hon. C Sacarello:** My question remains the same: will they give this the serious consideration that it deserves?

1570 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, nobody here, on this side, has laughed at what he has said. Nobody has taken it as a joke. The only joke is an Opposition that thinks that they can come here and, in a supplementary question, put a proposal that there should be a zebra crossing. If it was so important to the hon. Gentleman, it should be a policy matter which they express either in a press release or they take up with the Traffic Commission directly, or they do whatever it is that they think is appropriate. But to get up and to glibly say in a supplementary, 'Will you agree to put a zebra crossing there?' when that is not an area of our responsibility, when doing so could actually be more dangerous because of the area of road, which is just across a curve ... Perhaps
1575 the hon. Gentleman does not know that it is extremely dangerous to set up a pelican crossing, or indeed any zebra crossing, where there is a curve on the road, because it becomes more dangerous for the pedestrian. Perhaps he does not know that this is a crossing to a pavement which is so narrow that it would ill behove any mother with a pram, as he has referred to, to cross in that direction. Those are the issues which the experts know about, which I tangentially have
1580 knowledge of because we are sometimes referred to those things, and which hon. Members, if they raised the issue properly and in the right forum, might get the feedback from.

Nobody here is going to belittle that pedestrians should be protected, in particular mothers with babies, but people on that side should understand what it is they should be doing at Question Time, whose responsibility is what, what the Traffic Commissioners are experts in and what
1585 Ministers are not experts in. That is all I am saying to him. He can pretend that we have laughed at him, he can pretend that we have joked, but the reality is that he needs to work out what Parliament is about and who is responsible for what in this place.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q529/2024
Certificate of Roadworthiness –
Number of vehicles without

1590 **Clerk:** Question 529. The Hon. DJ Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: How many vehicles have been without a roadworthiness certificate for between each of one to 10 years, broken down by goods vehicles, private vehicles and motorcycles?
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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I hand over a schedule with the information requested – in fact, a little bit more than the
1600 information requested.

Madam Speaker: Whilst the hon. Member has time to consider it, we will move on to the next question.

Answer to Question 529/2024

Classic	Code	1-2 Yrs	2-3 Yrs	3-4 Yrs	4-5 Yrs	5-6 Yrs	6-7 Yrs	7-8 Yrs	8-9 Yrs	9-10 Yrs	10-11 Yrs
Classic	F	11	8	5	2	3	2	2	2	1	0
Goods	G/J	176	100	128	98	105	112	107	118	67	50
Moped	E	66	55	59	76	94	86	108	101	110	134
Motorcycle	M	696	545	569	468	487	419	444	500	499	470
Omnibus	O	5	8	0	0	0	4	1	2	5	1
Private	P	983	766	830	867	905	820	744	672	619	546
Private Hire	H	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Self Drive	D	6	7	2	2	1	0	2	1	2	1
Special	S	1	0	9	5	3	3	5	1	2	3
Taxi	T	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

Q530/2024

**Roadworthiness test –
Number of vehicles failing to book**

Clerk: Question 530. The Hon. DJ Bossino.

1605

Hon. D J Bossino: How many vehicles on their fourth anniversary of registration have failed to book for a roadworthiness test?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

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Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, 4,108 vehicles have failed to book for a roadworthiness test on their fourth anniversary of registration as of 20th June. An exercise commenced in March contacting and reminding these vehicle owners that they do not have a roadworthiness certificate. This has resulted in 452 vehicles either obtaining their roadworthiness certificates or having a pending booking for the test for those highlighted vehicles. These are additional and over and above those vehicles that have completed their roadworthiness test within time. The Chief Examiner and DVLD staff continue with the exercise.

1615

Hon. D J Bossino: Without wishing to pretend that I am an expert on these issues, on the face of it, from a layman's perspective and as a lowly politician who is not an expert on traffic matters, these numbers look pretty high. In other words, as we are now, it is 4,108, as the Hon. the Minister has replied, and as I understand it, of those 4,108, there are 452 that now either have had their certificates – he is nodding his head – or are in the process because they have had an appointment. He also said in his response that letters – which I think is a very useful initiative – have gone out in March to those offending vehicle owners. As I understand it, that was the policy before, that the Department would issue these letters. So, when the Hon. the Minister says that this policy was commenced in March this year, the accurate response would have been that it has recommenced. I would ask when the policy stopped and why did it stop.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not know the answer to that question. In my familiarisation with my new portfolio, it became evident to me early this year that there was an

1635 unacceptable backlog and therefore I took the initiative of *recommencing*, if the hon. Member wants, this process. Ten per cent of those vehicles we have managed to get back on track, if that is a term I can use in this context, and the exercise continues, and will continue because I am clearly not satisfied with the situation.

1640 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it the case, therefore, that all 4,108 vehicle owners have received this letter? Is that the position? He is suggesting by his body language that he does not have that information. It is very difficult, if he does not have the information available to him, to make the further point, because if he did and the position was that everybody had received it, the response, 10%, would be particularly low. This is an important issue because it deals with the safety of our cars out there in our streets. I would ask him if he can perhaps state whether he has that information as to whether all the offending vehicle owners ... Ultimately this is a traffic offence, not booking your car to obtain a roadworthiness certificate. These are offending owners and I would ask him to confirm whether all of them have received this notification.

1650 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I cannot possibly know whether all of them have received it. I believe that all of them have been sent. I would need to confirm that. I assume that is what the hon. Member meant. It is not what he asked, but I am happy to say I will confirm that. I believe certainly the instruction that came from my office was we have to get all these people on track and we have to resolve it, so I would have thought that they have all been sent.

Madam Speaker: Next question. (*Interjection by Hon. D J Bossino*)

Q531-32/2024
City Walls –
Refurbishment; contract for maintenance

1655 **Clerk:** Question 531. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: When will the City Walls be refurbished?

1660 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 532.

1665 **Clerk:** Question 532. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is there a contract to maintain the City Walls and clear them of overgrown weeds or shrubs?

1670 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1675 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 431, Gibraltar, as we know, boasts kilometres of walls both within our historic Old Town and along the original Line Wall and elsewhere. Whenever an urgent issue such as one with health and safety implications arises, we promptly address it. This was evident in last year's restoration of Southport Gates, previous work on the Tower of Homage, and the ongoing restoration of the outer Moorish Castle Wall along Castle Ramp. The latter project encompasses over 100 m² and we are diligently working on it.

Concurrently, we are also restoring the Convent facade and undertaking other heritage projects. Our professionals continually assess these needs, although clearly not everything can be addressed simultaneously given the extensive length of our walls.

1680 In answer to Question 532, no, Ma'am.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

1685 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Specifically on Question 532, if I may. I was slightly surprised by that answer, I have to say; I thought there was a contract to do that. It has been pointed out to me that there are areas of the City Wall that have these overgrown weeds and shrubs, so I assumed someone was responsible for going round and clearing them. Or is it the case that they are cleared in the context of wider refurbishment projects? While I am on my feet, does the Minister think it is an idea worth looking into, to have a contract, extended perhaps to one of the cleaning
1690 contractors or something, to clear the area the walls of overgrown weeds?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there is no specific contract but when a specific area needs to be cleared, the Department would normally go, I would have thought, to the horticultural contractors and ask them for quotes for specific areas. That is how it is dealt with. I think that a contract in itself might not be cost effective. There are some areas where there is growth of
1695 shrubs. Normally, if they are annual plants, they do not cause any structural damage, but if they are woody plants then clearly those are the ones that we have to prioritise, and if they create health and safety issues like we saw in Southport and like we have seen in the Castle Street area, then those are given priority. The professionals go around and when they see an area that needs
1700 tackling, it is tackled. I must say that I go around and when I see an area that needs tackling, I also bring it to the attention of the department in question.

Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

1705 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes.

Madam Speaker: On Question 531?

Hon. D J Bossino: In terms of ongoing projects, the responses that he has given, particularly as far as my friend the Leader of the Opposition is concerned, almost seem more reactive
1710 management as opposed to the Government having a plan, a project and a vision for what to do in respect of these walls. They are very attractive when properly refurbished and properly lit, and there are examples of that in what the Government has done – for example, round about the areas of Champion Park and Commonwealth Park.

1715 I know that the Government has made various promises in its manifesto in relation to this, but can I press him in relation to some statistics? What is the total length? Does he have that information? I think he made a reference to it in his initial response. What is the total length of the walls and square metreage of surface that we are dealing with here? What has the Government to date, in its 12 years in office, managed to refurbish, and what are its plans in
1720 respect of the remaining walls which require to be properly refurbished?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not have the length. I will ask the Heritage team if they can come up with a length; it would be interesting to know. I think it becomes de facto
1725 reactive because when you intend to programme restoration of walls but then you find that one particular area has an olive or fig tree growing through it, then you have to shift your priorities and deal with that, because there could be problems as to the structural integrity of the wall or danger to people walking below, which is what happened in Southport Gate, which was possibly

not going to be done straight away and was done because it had to be done. There is such a large extent of wall that fortunately a lot of it is in good condition. That is a testament to the people who built it in centuries gone by. I gave examples of some of the areas that have been recently dealt with, but as the hon. Member said, as a consequence of other work in adjacent areas, as in Commonwealth Park and Campion Park, then work is done on them. At the moment we are looking at priorities, particularly, as I said, where there are structural implications, and those are the ones that we have to prioritise.

Madam Speaker: One more.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, is the sum total of his response ...? We had our fair share of refurbishment works – in Chatham, famously, Kings Bastion, Orange Bastion ... Where I would like to pin him down is in relation to this: is it the Government's current position – it may not be its policy, it may not be its aim, it may not be the best place it wants to be in relation to this issue – that it will, in effect, only deal with maintenance aspects? He mentioned specifically Southport Gates, where he is right: as a result of the fact that it posed a danger to members of the public, that good refurbishment was carried out, but not as a result of a plan in order to improve our City Walls to make them more attractive for not just visitors but for local residents as well. He knows where I am going with this and I would like him to reply.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I just remembered as well that we also did the whole of Wellington Front, which is one that did not come up because I am working from memory; I have not gone systematically through it.

What I said before that it becomes de facto reactive. There are a number of areas of wall which we want to deal with, and I can think of several right now because we are just now looking at how we want to roll out the programme for all Departments, but specifically for Heritage, in the coming year. You have that programme, then you identify an area which is more urgent, and then we have to shift resources here, whether it be financial resources or curatorial resources, and therefore it becomes de facto reactive, even though the intention is that you are going to be doing it in a systematic way.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q533-34/2024

World War II Tunnels management agreement – Whether subcontracted; details of agreement

Clerk: Question 533. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, has any aspect of the World War II Tunnels management agreement been subcontracted, and if so, to whom; has the Government consented to such subcontracting, and if not, is there a provision in the management agreement that prevents subcontracting without the consent of the Government?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 534.

Clerk: Question 534. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1775 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what is the length of the management agreement entered into by the Government over the World War II Tunnels project; who are the parties to the agreement and what are the main financial terms in terms of payments to Government, income to the management entity, whether the Government will loan or contribute funds towards the cost of investment or refurbishment of the project, and who will retain the ticketing revenue?

1780 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1785 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 533, there are no subcontractors involved in the operation other than, as is logical, construction and electrical firms etc. to carry out the upgrading. Any change in the contract, including subcontracting of the operation, will require government consent.

1790 In answer to Question 534, the length of the contract is 15 years. The parties are Wrightttech Ltd and the Government. There are no direct payments to Government, but the contractor will manage, man, maintain and repair the site, resulting in a considerable saving to Government. In addition, a payment of 15% will be made to Government on income from any events etc. at the site.

1795 The arrangements with the contractor are commercially in confidence and I am not able to provide that information here. There has been and will be no contribution from the Government by way of loan, direct payment or other means towards any of the costs of refurbishment and upgrade. There will be no separate ticketing for the site, which will remain included in the general Upper Rock ticket.

1800 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I just understand the reference that he made? Halfway through his answer he said that some of what they have agreed is confidential in nature, but then he gave, I think, answers to most of my questions. Was he referring to something else? Without revealing the confidentiality of it, was he referring to something in particular which cannot be disclosed to the House in terms of a specific area?

1805 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member reads his question and then compares my answer, he will see that there is one particular subject, which is the arrangements with the contractor, which are the ones that I stated were commercially in confidence.

1810 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** May I ask him about Question 533? He says there is no subcontracting except in the context of the construction, but in the context of the construction there may be, then, presumably, and in relation to construction or electrical, I think he said. So, in relation to those, is government consent required for the subcontracting?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker.

1815 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And does the hon. Member know who those parties are?

1820 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Madam Speaker. I took the question as being whether the contractor was going to subcontract the operation of the site, rather than whether they have a particular electrical company or construction company. I would have to ask them for that information, and then I would have to determine whether I am at liberty to divulge that here, because it is a private arrangement.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Clerk: Question 535. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1825 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If I may, I had supplementaries on Question 534.

Madam Speaker: Because he started with Question 534 and then jumped to Question 533, I presumed the hon. Member had finished his supplementary. Back to Question 534?

1830 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, back to Question 534, which was the next one. I was trying to take them –

Madam Speaker: I understood that the hon. Member had started with Question 534 and then moved on to Question 533, which is why I presumed the hon. Member had finished, but we will go back to Question 534.

1840 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I had not. Thank you. In relation to Question 534, the hon. Member has said this is a 15-year agreement. I think that he said the Government receive 15% of income on events, which means that they take 85% of income on events, but there is no separate arrangement on ticketing because it is part and parcel of the entry into the site generally. It is a fairly long contract. Is there any clause in the agreement that allows a review of the arrangements so that the Government is not bound into this for such a long period? Is there some kind of review or break clause?

1845 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Speaker, I believe so, because that is quite standard in this type of contract, but I would have to check the actual wording. I would not like to mislead.

1850 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. I think he said – I am just seeking his clarification – that there is no contribution from the Government by way of loan or any other means. Does he know the cost of the project in terms of the refurbishment of the World War II Tunnels?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, not exactly off the top of my head, but I believe it is several million. I would need to check that.

1855 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** These arrangements have been reached, I assume, fairly recently; I am not sure if the hon. Member has a date. Is there no intention to be more specific about the arrangements, and indeed the project, given that it is clearly backed by the Government insofar as the Government has seen fit to give this entity a 15-year contract – and clearly it is intended to be a tourist project, isn't it?

1860 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, full details will be given once the project is complete and is ready to come into operation. At the moment, it is not yet finalised.

1865 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** In terms of income streams, as I understand it, the company is putting in millions but there is no separate ticketing arrangement, and they take 85% of income on events, but presumably events will be from time to time. What is the business model for the entity putting in millions, and indeed what is the Government gaining from these arrangements?

1870 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I think I have already answered this, but we have to bear in mind that the Government is getting an investment and an upgrade in a site where we know we had done some restoration, but the plans are far in excess of that. Everything else is a commercial arrangement, which is what I have already said in my original answer I am not able to provide.

1875 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I just have one more and perhaps this will clarify it for me. In relation to the ticketing itself, where he says there is no separate ticketing arrangement, does the company that is the manager of the site get part of the revenue on the ticketing, or does all that ticketing revenue go to the Government?

1880 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, this is now delving into the commercially in-confidence details that I have already said I cannot divulge. There are other entities that we are talking with, and therefore it is a sensitive matter that I do not wish to divulge here. I do not think it is correct that I should do so.

1885 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I do not understand that. What other entities can you possibly be discussing the matter with, because there are no separate ticketing arrangements? He has explained that as part of the original answer. There is a ticketing arrangement to enter into the site as a whole. There is one ticketing arrangement. There is not going to be a breakdown of many ticketing arrangements. So, as those ticketing arrangements are there already, why can't he be clear as to what those ticketing arrangements are? At the end of the day, they have already been put in place, and not in relation to this particular site because there are no separate ticketing arrangements. So, what are the ticketing arrangements in relation to the site and what is this company gaining from it?

1895 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the non-commercial ticketing arrangements are that you visit the World War II Tunnels for free if you are a local; if you are a tourist, you have already paid in your Upper Rock entrance ticket. We are talking to some other entities about similar, or possibly not dissimilar, arrangements in other sites, and therefore I cannot give commercially sensitive information here which might have an impact on other discussions.

1900 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But to be clear, there is an arrangement, which is the Upper Rock entry fee, which is split between the managers of this site and the Government. That is really what he is saying: at the heart of it, without telling us what the split is, there is a split arrangement. Otherwise, there would be no commercial confidentiality in it. He would just say the Government is taking 100% of the revenue.

1905

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition can surmise whatever he wishes to surmise, but I do not have anything further to add to this question.

1910 **Madam Speaker:** Next question. (*Interjection*) No, there have been eight supplementaries on this one alone. I think we have exhausted it.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I was not asking him to surmise. May I just ask him one question?

1915

Madam Speaker: One last question.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: It is not a question of surmising; I am asking him a very direct question. In the context of the site fee, is there a split arrangement or does the Government take all the revenue? He is the Minister: he knows whether the Government takes 100%.

1920

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Member to the third paragraph in my answer to Question 534. Apologies, Madam Speaker, the hon. Member does not have the text in front of him: 'The arrangements with the contractor are commercially in confidence and I am not able to provide that information here.'

1925

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q535/2024
Zone parking –
Enforcement arrangements

Clerk: Question 535. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1930 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, what are the enforcement arrangements in relation to zone parking?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

1935 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, enforcement of zonal parking is done primarily by Gibraltar Car Parks Ltd. The Parking Management Officers (PMOs) – traffic wardens, as we normally call them – have designated areas of responsibility covering all four zones from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. When an infringement occurs, a fixed penalty notice is issued to local vehicles and a clamp is placed to foreign vehicles – only as an assurance of payment; a clamp does not carry an extra fee. Only those with multiple tickets or
1940 more serious violations such as blocking main roads and zebra crossings, parking on pavements etc., will be towed away. The night patrol is from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. and covers all four zones in a reactive role – that is calls out from the public, obstructions, breakdown of vehicles, RGP assistance and they will also tackle abandoned vehicles.

1945 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, for that. I take it from his answer that, in effect, whether it is at night or during the day, it is almost 24-hour patrolling and enforcement in different areas, primarily driven by things like obstruction etc. The reason for the question was representations made to me that there was insufficient monitoring by the traffic wardens of things like occupation of spaces in zones by vehicles that do not have zone permits. Does he have
1950 information in relation to how people can complain about that?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I would have to ask for specific details of how many tickets have been issued and so on. The question was a general one on enforcement arrangements, which is the information I have given. One could delve into it in more detail.
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I think, actually, that the PMOs do a good job, in general. I think people will normally be able to find parking within their zone, but as I said, they are able to respond if there is a vehicle which is offending. They have a 24-hour service and they will respond to calls and deal with any complaints directly.

1960 **Hon. D J Bossino:** May I ask, just by way of clarification and in order to afford the House a full answer: the Hon. the Minister said that the enforcement is, in effect, carried out, he said 'primarily', by the relevant company that he referred to. Beyond that, what is it: police officers? Is that what he is referring to? I imagine that the vast majority of the enforcement is carried out
1965 by this company.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker, the Police obviously have powers to do this. The majority of the day-to-day work is done by the parking management officers.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q536/2024

**Urban wastewater treatment plan project –
Update**

1970 **Clerk:** Question 536. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can the Government update the House on the proposed urban wastewater treatment plant project and the award of the tender to design, build, finance and operate it?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the tender for the urban wastewater treatment plant was issued in June 2023 and closed in July 2023. Preferred bidder status was granted to Eco Waters Ltd in September 2023, in recognition that the tender submitted by them appeared to represent the most economically advantageous tender. Since then, a multidisciplinary team of officials and consultants making up the project team has been liaising with this tenderer to clarify a number of technical and commercial details, so that, when satisfied, the tender board, composed of senior public service officials, may make a final award recommendation to the Government. It is not possible to place a defined timescale for the completion of the stage, but it is expected to be completed within the next few months.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: But the situation is still unchanged in the fact that Eco Waters still have preferred bidder status, they are undergoing these discussions with the Government leading to final award but there are still other bidders – is that still the situation? They have preferred bidder status but there are other bidders? Or do the other bids lapse? Or are they fallback bids were Eco Waters not to then go to final award?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, when a bidder is given preferred bidder status, it is preferred bidder status; it is highly likely that the issues that need to be resolved are going to be resolved, and then they will be awarded the final tender, but it is not necessarily the case, and therefore other bidders could be called in. I do not have the detail as to whether the others fitted the requirements. I do not sit on the tender board, I am not actively involved, it is not appropriate for me to do so, and therefore I cannot tell the hon. Member whether any of the other bidders are potential successful tenders. But having spoken to a representative of Eco Waters only this morning, to see how things were going, it seems to me that we are making considerable progress and that at least an advanced works contract might be in the offing very soon.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In terms of the preferred bidder status, under this contract is that an open-ended status, or is there a time limit? In some contracts, I suppose it may have a time limit. In this one, I do not take from his original answer that implicit in it was there an indication that there might be a time limit, but I am not sure if he has information on that.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information. I can find out very quickly and I can let the hon. Member know.

Madam Speaker: Can we deal now with any supplementaries there may be to Question 529, and that will conclude the questions for the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change? Any supplementaries? (**Hon. D J Bossino:** No.) Has the Member forgotten to study it?

Next question.

2020 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am conscious that we have now been at it for close on two and a half hours. I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment to recess until 5.50 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Yes, I will happily recess until 5.50 p.m.

The House recessed at 5.38 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.50 p.m.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q561/2024

**Parliament building refurbishment –
Update re progress**

2025 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.
Question 561. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide an update on the progress of the refurbishment works to the Parliament building?

2030 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

2035 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Madam Speaker, yes. Works are currently focusing on the exterior of Parliament. These works mainly consist of the rendering of the facade, repairs to stone columns and iron balconies. This week saw the removal and replacement of severely damaged concrete balusters along the perimeter of the roof. Works are expected to continue along the summer months until the end of the year, with interruptions should there be any parliamentary sessions.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q562/2024

**Parliament building refurbishment –
Update re cost**

2040 **Clerk:** Question 562. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the Minister provide an update on the cost to date for the recent and ongoing refurbishment works to the Parliament building?

2045 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, yes. The costs to date are £147,952.40.

2050 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for that answer. I understand that the works in relation to the Parliament building are being done in two phases. One is for the

2055 repair and refurbishment of the works on the exterior part of the building. The other is the interior part, which encapsulates the lift project. My understanding is that the expenses for the exterior refurbishment were through a donation made by a charitable organisation to Government, and the Government was using those funds for the refurbishment. Can the Government confirm whether the whole of the charitable donation accounted for the cost of the refurbishment, or whether the Government had to put in some of their own funds for the same?

2060 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, yes, the hon. Member is correct. There is a donation of £200,000 which will be made by the Parasol Group. The Government is now in the process of receiving those funds.

2065 **Hon. G Origo:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am grateful to the Minister for that answer. My understanding was that the funds from the Parasol Foundation would be used explicitly for the exterior refurbishment works to Parliament. Can the Hon. Minister confirm, therefore, what the cost would be to install the lift in the interior part of the project to Parliament, if he has that information?

2070 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, those are not costings I have seen as yet, but the Member is correct, the funds donated by the Parasol Group are in respect of the external refurbishment of the building.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Q537/2024

HMP Windmill Hill –

Weekly counselling clinics

2075 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.
Question 537. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: In relation to drug and alcohol misuse and offending, can the Government confirm whether a counsellor is holding weekly clinics in HMP Windmill Hill?

2080 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, yes, drugs and alcohol misuse counselling is offered in the Prison by the Care Agency on a weekly basis and the service is offered on demand.

2085 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q538/2024
HMP Windmill Hill –
Resumption of counselling services

Clerk: Question 538. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, has the provision of counselling services now resumed at Windmill Hill Prison? If not, what is the expected timeframe for this service to resume?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, as I have stated in answer to a previous question, drugs and alcohol misuse counselling is provided by the Care Agency on a weekly basis and the service is offered on demand. This is in addition to the work carried out by the MAPPA designated risk managers and Care Agency counsellors, who work with prisoners serving sentences for relevant offences.

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The provision of psychological services has been the subject of a recent pilot scheme at His Majesty's Prison by the GHA Psychological Services. This pilot was undertaken over a six-week period and has only recently ended. GHA Psychological Services will report their findings in due course.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful. Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether the Hon. Minister is aware, but the Prison has been without a counselling service now for a period of three years – until recently, it seems – and that is in the recent reports of the Mental Health Board that the Minister has just referred to. The benefits of counselling and talking therapies in a prison setting cannot be underestimated if rehabilitation is to be the central aim of a prison system. Why, therefore, hasn't there been a counselling service at Her Majesty's Prison for three years, until recently?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, the premise of the question is flawed. The premise of the question is that counselling services have not been provided. In other words, if you are asking whether counselling services will be resumed, then what you are suggesting is that counselling services are not being provided in the Prison. That is not the case.

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The hon. Member has also indicated that the permanent counsellor based at the Prison is no longer there and has not been there – I think the word that she used was 'recently'. Again, that was not the case. Kevin Lawlor – and I have a great deal of respect for Kevin; I know him personally, not professionally, but I have no doubt that he was a very good professional in his field – unfortunately left for the UK in 2020, and therefore the arrangement that has since been made with the Prison Service is for the Care Agency to provide counselling services to the Prison. I have met with Carlos Banderas, the CEO of the Care Agency, and we have had a detailed discussion because the premise of the question seemed to suggest that services were not being provided. Mr Banderas has assured me that services are in place, that, in fact – and I read from notes which I took of the meeting – there are no waiting lists or referral lists for any counselling at the Prison. He has also provided me with a schedule of the services that are being provided in this area. I can compare the number of inmates receiving counselling services for the first four months of this year compared to last year. I have that information in front of me. In the last four months of this year, 13 inmates were receiving counselling services at the Prison compared to 17 inmates for the first four months of last year. Can we please ensure, for the record, Madam Speaker, that there is no gap in the provision of counselling services at the Prison?

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2135 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that clarification. Nevertheless, it was stated in the report of the Mental Health Board that there was a gap, given that there is not, as the Minister correctly states, a permanent counsellor at the Prison, which there was three years ago – Mr Lawlor, who I did work professionally with and who was an excellent counsellor. Are there any plans to re-implement that system, or will we just be relying on this new system?

2140 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, in answer to the question, I have stated, and I repeat, that a pilot scheme was undertaken at the Prison. We are awaiting a report, and indeed we will review any recommendations that are made. I have not seen the report. I do not think the Minister herself has seen the report yet, because it has not been handed down formally for review. When it is, I think the question then becomes pertinent. I should have also said that currently – and I do have this as part of my supplementary information – only one inmate has requested the provision of counselling services at the Prison, *one* inmate, and indeed the point has been emphatically made to me that there are no waiting lists at present.

2145 I should also add that I made a point of visiting the Prison today – I visit the Prison as often as I can – and I asked the senior management team to allow me to talk to inmates, so they opened one of the wings for me. I was accompanied by Jayne Wink, who I think is very well known in Gibraltar for the sterling work that she provides in this particular area, especially for men, and the Men in Need group as well. I must have spoken to every single inmate in that wing who wanted to speak to me, together with Mrs Wink. We asked whether there was anything that we could do, if there was anything that the Prison could do, or anything that the Government could do to support them in any of their needs, and the answer was that they were very well looked after in the Prison. They made two requests: they asked for a treadmill, because apparently the treadmill does not work properly, so they have asked if we could provide a treadmill and some benches, and Mrs Wink has made an appeal this afternoon for a treadmill to be donated to the Prison. I am sure that even that particular request will be seen to very shortly indeed.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q539/2024
HMP Windmill Hill –
Anti-bullying policy

2160 **Clerk:** Question 539. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2165 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the Prison Service have an anti-bullying policy in place for adherence to by staff, and, if so, since when has this policy been in place? If it does not have such a policy, is there an intention to introduce one, and what is the timeframe for its introduction?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2170 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, I am informed that His Majesty's Government has a central Dignity at Work policy that extends to all public service institutions, including the Prison. However, the Prison Service is currently working in collaboration with the Industrial Relations Department, Unite the Union and prison staff towards a new working arrangement which will include a bespoke anti-bullying policy.

2175 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Just one short question arising: does the Hon. Minister have an estimated timeframe as to when that could be concluded and implemented?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, we expect to have an advanced working draft for consideration and conclusion by October this year.

2180 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q540/2024
Prison Service –
Changes since General and Clerical Association survey of members

Clerk: Question 540. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2185 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what changes have there been to the Prison Service since the emergence of the Gibraltar General and Clerical Association survey of its members in March 2019?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2190 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, since the emergence of the Gibraltar General and Clerical Association's survey of its members in March 2019, I am advised by the senior management team of the Prison that there have been a number of changes in the Prison Service which, I am informed, have addressed many of the issues that were raised at the time. These changes, which I am informed have greatly improved morale in the Prison Service, include the following.

2195 (1) The survey raised an issue with personal development of officers. The senior management team has since implemented a policy inviting officers to discuss their personal development and to increase feedback given to officers.

2200 (2) The question of training was also raised. The training team now works with the senior management team to identify officers who require additional training and those to be entrusted with extra responsibilities. The senior management team sent three officers to Cyprus for instructor training, enabling them to train prison officers in control and restraint techniques. This training is essential for the safety of both officers and inmates. Over the past year, officers have received training in various other areas, including fire safety, use of force, first aid, attentive listening, suicide first aid, safeguarding, domestic abuse and MAPPA training. The senior management team will continue to identify suitable courses for the department and ensure that staff members receive the necessary training to perform their duties to the best of their ability.

2205 (3) Following the 2019 survey, both officers and management agreed on a new shift pattern, as this had been raised in the survey.

2210 (4) The senior management team, in collaboration with the Industrial Relations department and Unite the Union, is developing a new working agreement to replace the 1988 Fresh Start Agreement. As I have mentioned in a previous answer, this new agreement will also introduce a bespoke anti-bullying policy.

2215 (5) I am also informed by the senior management team that issues raised in the survey with regard to the welfare and aftercare of officers and in relation to prison security and staffing levels have also been addressed.

It is expected that the issues I have mentioned, together with other matters highlighted in the survey, will continue to improve.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful and we are glad to hear that those improvements have been made. Just one question arising from that survey which the Hon. Minister has not touched upon.
2220 In that survey, 76% were unhappy with department equipment, and 83% said that more maintenance was needed for office space and IT. Have those concerns been addressed? And if not, will they be addressed in the near future?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I have the survey's findings here and management's
2225 comment against each of the issues raised. I cannot, right now, find the specific reference that the hon. Lady is referring to, but I can assure her, having gone through this with the senior management team in my office and my Justice team, that I have been reassured, and therefore I should reassure the hon. Lady, that the matters that have been raised have either been dealt with or are in the process of being dealt with as quickly as possible.

2230 I can also say, because I think this is the last question in relation to the Prison, that out of all my Ministries, the one where I have met staff more than in any of the other Ministries that I hold, is actually the Prison Service. I have visited the Prison on a number of occasions, and every time I visit I ask to meet staff, and when I meet staff I ask them, 'Are there any outstanding issues that you want to bring to my attention? Is there anything, with or without the presence of senior
2235 management, that you would like to have me address?' and the answer that I have been given is that there is nothing outstanding, certainly when I have visited the Prison. Outside the Prison, I must have met with prison officers on at least four occasions, and the issues that have been raised with us and that we are dealing with, with my hon. colleague Leslie Bruzon, are entirely related to allowances. In other words, nobody, for the record, has either raised an issue with regard to
2240 bullying – and I am not suggesting that the hon. Member has queried whether or not that is the case, but I would like to put it on the record that no prison officer has raised with me any issue of bullying – or any other matter, other than allowances and a particular issue involving casual leave. I have asked the prison officers to come back with a recommendation, so that I can then sit down with the senior management team to see whether we can address even that particular issue,
2245 Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q541/2024
Law Library –
Whether in use**

Clerk: Question 541. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

2250 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the Law Library within the precincts of the Supreme Court currently in use? If not, is there a timeframe by which the library can be expected to be functioning?

2255 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the use of the Law Library at the Gibraltar Law Court is governed by the Law Library Rules, which are made by the Chief Justice. Very properly, given the separation of powers between Parliament, the Executive and the Judiciary, neither I, as the Minister for Justice, nor any other Member of the
2260 Government, has any involvement in this matter. The Member opposite may wish to address the matter directly with the Registrar of the Supreme Court.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q542-45/2024

**Outstanding warrants of arrest –
Numbers from 2011 to 2023; age of warrants;
reasons for backlog, and plans and timeframe for addressing**

Clerk: Question 542. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide the number of outstanding warrants of arrest at the conclusion of the following years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I will answer the question together with Questions 543 to 545.

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Clerk: Question 543. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how old are the oldest warrants of arrest amongst the 15,000 unexecuted warrants of arrest recently flagged by the RGP?

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Clerk: Question 544. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are the main reasons for having 15,000 unexecuted warrants of arrest issues with staffing levels and limited resources within the RGP, and what will be done to address this backlog?

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Clerk: Question 545. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, is there an estimated timeframe by which the RGP expects to have addressed the backlog of the 15,000 unexecuted warrants of arrest?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, with respect to Question 542, I am informed that providing the information requested would be impossible. This is because the information is not kept in year chronology but in alphabetical order by name in a database. There is also an issue that original executed warrants are returned to the courts and, as such, it would be impossible to come to an accurate number of warrants at the end of each year, as these are no longer in the possession of the RGP.

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In respect of Question 543, similarly, as the warrants are not kept chronologically, I am advised that in order to ascertain the date of the oldest warrants, a manual search through all warrants would need to be undertaken and this would be an onerous task. However, a random sample has been looked at and the oldest warrant identified through that sample dated to 1990. I am also informed that this random sample confirms that many of the warrants relate to unpaid fines and non-residents of Gibraltar.

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With respect to Question 544, the backlog of unexecuted warrants is a historical issue that dates back over the past few decades and I am informed by the RGP that it is not related to staffing issues or resources. I am further informed that the RGP conducts operations from time to time in respect of warrants against individuals in addition to routine checks which are carried out whenever officers come into contact with members of the public.

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2310 In response to Question 545, I am advised that there is no timeframe in place to deal with the outstanding warrants, as warrants date back over the recent decades.

I have had a discussion within my Ministry in order to ascertain whether there are any ways to deal with this issue, for example through legislation. However, as Madam Speaker will appreciate, this may not be possible due to the need to ensure fairness and the separation of powers between
2315 Parliament, the executive and the judiciary, namely non-interference with court procedures and orders of the court.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister. If there is no system in place –

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Madam Speaker: May I stop the hon. Member? Can you refer to which question out of those you are addressing, so that we can keep focus?

Hon. J Ladislaus: Let me work out which one it is ... It does cut across all of them.

2325 We have heard that the system does not allow for certain data to be extracted because it would be too onerous, so the first question, I think, is how, therefore, has the number of 15,000 unexecuted arrest warrants been arrived at? Where has that number come from? I think the second question must be is there a way to improve that system, to keep these databases updated so that they can be accessed more easily?

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Hon. N Feetham: I am obliged, Madam Speaker. Yes, the way that I have understood it from my discussions with the Commissioner ... We had a session with the Commissioner last week, my Justice Ministry team. Unless I have misunderstood the system, the system is one where the information is kept in a Microsoft Access spreadsheet. I am not technologically able, but I assume that in a spreadsheet the number of whatever is held there is visibly available to those who control the database. I would not be able to answer the question directly other than that this is the information that has been made available to me. I am looking at my notes. The Commissioner has also confirmed that the RGP is in the process of changing the way that warrants are recorded by moving all warrants on to Cyclops, the RGP system.

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Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, may I invite the Minister to go back to the RGP, or whoever maintains this database, and ask them if they can sort it by date? He has used spreadsheets, as I have used spreadsheets, and it is not rocket science to sort data fields into things like date order. I wonder if he could ask the keeper of this database whether that would be possible, which I know it is if it is on a spreadsheet. That will be helpful to us in Parliament to understand the ageing of these warrants.

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Hon. N Feetham: I am very happy to ask the question of the Commissioner when I next see him, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I can go to one of the questions specifically, and it is Question 544, I believe. If the issues with the delays in executing these arrest warrants are historic and they do not have anything to do with resources or lack thereof, what then has caused such a backlog of execution of warrants?
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Hon. N Feetham: Again, Madam Speaker, referring to my notes of our meeting with the Commissioner, when I asked a similar question the Commissioner stated to us that there are between 3,000 and 4,000 crimes reported, on average, a year in Gibraltar, against a significant
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number of people – 250,000 people – that cross the border each week. This naturally creates a large number of warrants. When individuals are bailed or fined, they cross back over and do not come back to Gibraltar. Whilst we do not have the exact number, the Commissioner’s best guess – without having the information, because as I said, that information is not readily available from an interrogation of the system – is that between 60% and 70% of cases relate to foreign nationals. I am also reassured that where there are warrants relating to serious matters, these are executed immediately and the Police will chase and ensure that the relevant individuals are dealt with in accordance with the law. Where there are serious cases of individuals having left the jurisdiction, again I am also reassured that extradition requests are appropriately made. Finally, Madam Speaker, the Commissioner emphasised that most of these actually relate to fixed penalty notices – for car parking tickets, I assume is what he is referring to, and the non-payment thereof.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I just ask a couple of questions, the first on Question 542? The Hon. Minister replied to my colleague the Hon. Mr Clinton that he would refer the possibility of ... (**Hon. R M Clinton:** Ageing – sorry, I am not an Excel user – to the keeper of that ... If, having referred the ageing process to the keeper of the database, he is able to sort by date and there is an impact on his original answer to Question 542 because it is possible to break it down by years, would the Minister agree to write to us on that issue?

While I am on my feet, the more substantive question is this. The Minister spoke about, at the end of his original answer, because there is such a high number, the possibility of the Government considering other things, like perhaps even legislation, but the Minister was mindful of not cutting across the judiciary, and he has had discussions with the RGP, but it strikes me that these are judicially issued arrest warrants. Sometimes it is appropriate for Government to sit down with the Registrar of the Supreme Court – if, for example, the judiciary wishes rules or legislation to be issued. Does he think it is a good idea to perhaps have a conversation with the Registrar? It may be that there are very historic issues that can be dealt with by rules or legislation and that the Registrar or the judiciary might have views in relation to a certain type of warrant.

Hon. N Feetham: We have had that meeting with the judiciary, Madam Speaker. Can I suggest that perhaps we have a conversation behind the Speaker’s Chair?

Madam Speaker: One more, yes.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, this one cuts across again. There was mention of the Cyclops system and transferring – the technical term, I believe, is migrating – the data on to that system. Does the Hon. Minister have a timeframe as to when that data may be migrated on to Cyclops?

Hon. N Feetham: No, I do not, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q546-47/2024
Income tax –
Amounts collected in May 2023 and May 2024

Clerk: Question 546. The Hon. R M Clinton.

2405 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amount of income tax collected in May 2024?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2410 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 547.

Clerk: Question 547. The Hon. R M Clinton.

2415 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the amount of company tax collected in May 2024?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2420 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, the amount of income tax collected for the month of May 2024 is £20.82 million.
The amount of company tax collected for the month of May 2024 is £0.54 million.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q548/2024
RGP launches –
Whether operational

2425 **Clerk:** Question 548. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the RGP launch operational?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

2430 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, the RGP has confirmed that it has operational launches.

Hon. D J Bossino: That is in the plural.

2435 **Hon. N Feetham:** I have been very generous.

Hon. D J Bossino: Can the Hon. Minister say how many launches are available to the RGP, and are they all fully operational such that our waters are being kept safe and there are not any issues surrounding that?

2440 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, I have been very generous with the hon. Member, but he did ask in the singular: 'Is the RGP launch operational?' I could have said yes, but I have obviously addressed the question in the plural because there is more than one launch operational.

2445 I am afraid that on this question the Commissioner has advised caution. He has said be cautious about what information you put in the public domain because, as the hon. Member may recall, in answer to previous questions relating to the policing of our territorial waters, it is information which the criminal fraternity might make use of.

2450 I can assure the hon. Member of two things. First of all, that the Commissioner has reassured me, because I have asked him the very same question that the hon. Member is asking me. I quote here from the notes that I took: 'Overall, with the assets available, the RGP is happy with the footprint to protect our waters.' I have the information that he has asked for, but can I suggest, Madam Speaker, that I make that information available to him behind the Speaker's Chair? You will be surprised to know that actually the resources are there and there is no catch to this particular question.

2455 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am sure my hon. colleague will have that conversation, but I just want to be clear because the question was, 'Is the RGP launch operational?' and the Minister generously responded that the RGP have operational launches, using that phrase. May I ask, are all RGP launches operational?

2465 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Chief Minister reminds me that in any organisation there will always be a particular asset that requires refitting or repair at any given point in time, but I have said, in the plural, there is more than one operational launch and that the Commissioner has confirmed that the assets that are available – in other words, more than one – are sufficient for him to be able to do the job that he is doing. If I then went into the details around what use, for example, is being made of other launches, that, I think, is information that he has strongly discouraged me from putting in the public domain.

2470 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I understand what the Hon. the Minister is saying, that it has been recommended to him by the Commissioner of Police to exercise caution, and given the nature of the way that he has responded to the questions, he is taking that on board – he need not have, but he has politically taken that advice on board, and he is therefore exercising that caution in the responses. But may I ask him this? I do not think he has answered my supplementary question, which is how many launches. Is he able to say how many launches are available to the RGP? May I also ask him – I think I would ask it by way of confirmation of the reply that he has already given, but perhaps a fuller reply – whether he is satisfied, politically that is, as the Minister responsible for this, that the manning arrangements are such that they are up to scratch, and that there are not any issues in relation to the manning of these vessels?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, from the information available to me, the Commissioner has reassured me that he is satisfied. That is the best answer that I can give him.

2485 With regard to his question around how many operational launches are available, it is not that I do not want to give him that information. I will give him that information behind the Speaker's Chair. I do take strong advice into account when it is given, particularly when it is given by the Commissioner in good faith.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q549-50/2024

**Economic Crime Unit of the Ministry for Justice –
Number of staff and job titles; recruitment of financial crime investigator**

2490 **Clerk:** Question 549. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many people are actually employed or work within the Economic Crime Unit of the Ministry for Justice at 14th June 2024, and what are their job titles?

2495

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I will answer the question together with Question 550.

2500

Clerk: Question 550. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Why is the Government recruiting a financial crime investigator to work in the Ministry for Justice?

2505

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the Ministry for Justice does not have an economic crime unit. The Economic Crime Unit is a unit within the Royal Gibraltar Police. On 13th June 2024, there were no people at the Economic Crime Unit of the RGP who are employed by or who work in the Ministry for Justice.

2510

The Government is recruiting two financial crime investigators for the Economic Crime Unit to bolster the existing team and assist with the investigation of financial crimes and the recovery of the proceeds of crime. The financial crime investigators are Gibraltar Development Corporation posts. The advert states that the post holders may be deployed to different locations. Nevertheless, the main workplace will be at the Economic Crime Unit. The financial crime investigators will be under the operational direction of the RGP. The Ministry for Justice role will be to provide ancillary administrative support such as leave approvals and personnel records etc. There will be no involvement whatsoever by the Ministry in their investigative and operational duties. This is similar to the manner in which other specialised posts, such as the probation officers, the community service officer and the Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit are administered.

2515

2520

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, let's probe that, shall we, because this is the issue that prompted the question. The advert itself – and that is why I asked how many people work within the Economic Crime Unit of the Ministry for Justice – says 'Department, Economic Crime Unit' and so it is a GDC post: 'Financial crime investigator in the Economic Crime Unit, responsible to Principal Secretary, Ministry for Justice'. That is what the advert says, hence the confusion. I certainly welcome the assurance that the Minister has given that this is, in effect, an RGP post, but can I ask him: this is an RGP administrative post? It is not a police appointment because obviously it would not be conducted in this way, as I understand it, so this is administrative support, in effect, for someone who will work within the Police and be accountable and responsible to the Police and not the Ministry. Is my understanding correct?

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2530

Hon. N Feetham: Correct, Madam Speaker.

2535

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The hon. Member says this is the way it has been done in relation to other intelligence units, but I just ask the hon. Member if perhaps that confusion can be dealt with in future. I printed the latest financial intelligence officer job specification. The job specification of financial crime investigator, economic crime, and the job specification of financial intelligence officer. When it gets to the part where it says 'responsible to' in the GFIIU one, it says 'responsible to the Intelligence Manager at the GFIIU'. That, as I understand it, is a police person. It does not

2540

say that in relation to the job specification of the financial crime investigator; it says 'responsible to the Principal Secretary of the Ministry for Justice'. When you look at the job specification, which is about gathering of relevant information, intelligence and evidence, preparing case summaries and files for consideration by the Crown prosecution, litigation and handling evidence, it is obviously not a Ministry function; it is a function of the RGP, which I think the hon. Member accepts. Does he agree that if, in future, there are going to be further jobs put out there for financial crime investigators of that type, it should be dealt with clearly in the job specification, like they do with the GFIU posts, so that there is no confusion in future?

Hon. N Feetham: Yes, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to relay that information to HR and I am sure they will take that on board. I had not seen the notice when the notice was published, but I certainly saw the bulletin of circulars and there is no reference here to the Ministry of Justice having any active role other than there was a reference with regard to location which specified 'Ministry of Justice, Customs, Government Law Offices or any other location as required'. I think for future reference any reference to the Ministry of Justice should not be there, I accept that.

Madam Speaker: All right.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, may I move that the House should now adjourn until tomorrow at 3.30 in the afternoon, to continue with Question Time?

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do adjourn to tomorrow at 3.30 p.m.

I now put the question, which is at this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 3.30 p.m. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Tuesday 25th June at 3.30 p.m.

The House adjourned at 6.35 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.35 p.m. – 8.00 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 25th June 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.35 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament Tuesday, 25th June 2024.

Madam Speaker Ruling

5 **Madam Speaker:** Before we continue with Written Questions, if you will all indulge me, I am going to make a brief – or maybe not so brief, but as brief as possible – ruling.

Last week the Hon. D J Bossino wrote to me and we had a discussion thereafter. The Hon. Mr Bossino requested that I review my decision to hold oral question marked as Clerk's number 141, Question 141, inadmissible for this session. As an alternative, he requested that he be allowed to ask a supplementary question to written answer W73/2024, which answer was in response to Oral Question 492/2024. The matter was a little more complex and nuanced than I have just surmised, but I have written to the Hon. Member fully responding to the specific points he raised, and I do not propose to rehearse that reply now.

15 That said, matters of important general principle arise from the exchange, and it is those matters which are the subject of this ruling. Relevant rules.

Rule 13(1) provides that: a question shall not be asked without notice unless the Speaker permits it in certain defined circumstances. Rule 13(2) provides for the period in which notice of questions must be given.

Rule 16(1) provides that questions shall be answered by laying a written answer, but where a Member requires an oral answer to a question, an oral answer shall be given.

20 Rule 16(2) provides that if a question remains unanswered when Parliament adjourns, a written answer shall be sent to the Member. There is a proviso to that section, which allows for a Member within three days to require in writing that the oral answer be postponed to the next sitting.

Rule 16(5)(i) makes it clear that:

A Member may put a supplementary question or questions for the purpose of further elucidating any matter of fact arising out of an oral answer given ...

25 And rule 17(1)(v) provides that a question shall not refer to any answer that has been given within the preceding six months.

30 Trite that where a Member opts *ab initio* to file written questions, there is no right to raise supplementary questions, and the practice of this House quite properly reflects that rule. There are, however, two areas that I wish to address. Both relate to the situation where an oral question remains unanswered at the close of a parliamentary session, and a Member has not requested it be carried over to the next session. In those circumstances it will, by default attract a written answer.

35 In the first scenario, if the written answer is filed after the close of the deadline for the filing of oral questions, should a Member nevertheless be allowed to file another question which, for ease of reference, I may call a secondary question. By secondary question, I mean not a supplementary question, but a question formulated as a result of the information received in the written answer, but which does not infringe Rule 17(1)(v). In my view, the short answer to that at present is no, because there are no provisions identifying a deadline by which written answers to converted oral questions should be provided, nor is there provision for the consequence of a dilatory answer.

40 This creates a lacuna in procedure which, in the absence of rules, requires guidance from the Chair. And I will address the matter presently through this ruling.

In the second scenario, if the written answer is filed in a timely fashion, would a Member be allowed in circumstances to ask supplementary questions in the next session? In support of this latter proposition, I am referred to a ruling of 5th October 2021 by Speaker Farrell, as he then was. 45 It is a short ruling, and I believe for the purpose of *Hansard*, it is best to read it:

On the 23rd of September 2021, the Leader of the Opposition sought clarity in the interpretation of Standing Orders 16(2), which provides the procedure to be followed in the case of tabled oral questions, which remain unanswered when Parliament adjourns on the last day of a meeting. The Leader of the Opposition specifically pursued clarification in respect of oral questions converted to written ones, and whether Opposition Members would be permitted to ask follow-up questions at the next meeting of Parliament should they choose to do so, in respect of any or all of the questions.

I have perused Standing Orders 16(2) and 17(1)(v) which are relevant to the matter, and have given careful consideration to the points raised by the Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Edwin Reyes. My ruling is as follows.

‘Follow-up questions in respect of those remaining unanswered questions, for which Opposition Members had opted to receive a written answer, will be allowed to be tabled at the next meeting of Parliament. Standing Order 17(1)(v) will not be applied in this particular case or any similar cases in the future. The right to answer questions is governed by the rules contained in Standing Order 17. These rules do not make a distinction between written and oral questions. It therefore follows that any question, be it oral or written to be asked in the normal course of parliamentary business, falls within the scope of Standing Order 17(1)(v). The application of which will remain as it is at present, i.e. the six-month rule will apply. The practice in relation to statistical questions will remain unaffected. In relation to questions on matters of significant public interest I may be minded to use my discretion and depart from the scope of the Standing Order.

The ruling of 5th October 2021 seems to conclude that because there is no differentiation in rule 17 between written and oral questions, supplementary questions would be allowed in respect of oral questions which had attracted a written answer, and specifically provides that in those circumstances, Rule 17(1)(v) would not be applied.

With respect to Speaker Farrell, I take a different view. The fair and smooth running of Parliament can only be guaranteed if all Members abide by the rules. In my view, it is not open to the Speaker to opt not to apply a rule that has neither been repealed or amended. The ruling talks of the right to answer questions being governed by Rule 17. I presume that is a typo, as Rule 17 deals with the right to *ask* questions. In any event, while Speaker Farrell is right that Rule 17 does not distinguish between oral and written questions, it is not Rule 17 which provides for supplementary questions, that is governed by Rule 16. And Rule 16 does draw a distinction between oral and written questions, evident from Rule 16(5)(i) that supplementary questions were intended to follow only oral and not written questions.

The purpose of posing questions can only be to obtain answers. Those answers will be obtained whether they are given orally or in writing. Therefore, the only real advantage of posing an oral question must be to have the opportunity to expand on the subject matter of the answer by posing further relevant supplementary questions. The default position is that if oral questions remain unanswered at the close of a session, those questions will attract written answers. But in order that a Member be not deprived of the right to ask supplementary questions, the proviso affords Members the opportunity to carry their oral questions to the next session.

The proviso thus enshrines the right to ask supplementary questions, and it is that proviso which persuades me conclusively that supplementary questions can only attach to oral questions. The proviso would be redundant had the intention been to allow supplementary questions to attach to written answers. The rules are unambiguous in this regard.

By way of conclusion,

1. Oral questions not answered in Parliament and which, by default, attract written answers pursuant to Rule 16(2), must be answered promptly, but in any event no later than seven days, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays next, after the adjournment of Parliament. This this will give Hon. Members the opportunity to further file questions if they so wish. Those questions should not be supplementary questions and should not infringe Rule 17(1)(v). In the event that a written answer is received outside the above time limit and the time for giving notice of questions pursuant to Rule 13(2) has expired, a Member may apply to the Speaker for permission pursuant to Rule 13(1) to ask a further question, provided that question does not infringe rule 17(1)(v).
2. Supplementary questions will not be allowed to be asked in respect of oral questions that attract written answers. The right to ask supplementary questions attaches only to questions that are asked orally in Parliament.
3. For the avoidance of doubt there is not, nor should there be, any point in time prior to an oral question being answered in Parliament when the Speaker can rule a question to be inadmissible. Quoting from Erskine May 356, 24th edition, "the Speaker is the final authority as to the admissibility of questions. On his attention being drawn to an irregularity the Speaker has refused to permit a question to be asked, although it stood upon the paper."

50 A question is allowed until such point as it is disallowed. If the Speaker becomes aware or realises that a question contravene the rules, it is incumbent upon the Speaker to disallow the question. Given that this ruling is binding as from today, and is introducing a slight change in procedure, I will leave copies behind the Speaker's Chair should any hon. Member wish to familiarise themselves with its contents before it is uploaded on to *Hansard*.

All right, we can proceed with questions.

55

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, can I just, as Leader of the House, on behalf of all Members, thank you for that very helpful guidance in some areas where, for example, there have been no time limits set out in the Standing Orders, I think it is good for us all to know what time limits we need to comply with.

60

If I could just also ask you to consider – and perhaps consult with the Hon. Mr Bossino in this respect – whether you would agree that the exchange of correspondence that you have had should also be shared more widely with the rest of us, in case it is helpful. You referred to some details being referred to in the context of that letter. It may be helpful for the rest of us also to see the weeds into which you have gone in that correspondence.

65

And finally, Madam Speaker, by way of comment, it is clear that you can take the judge out of the Supreme Court, but ...

Thank you very much indeed.

70

Madam Speaker: Mr Bossino, I can speak with you later, or you can indicate now whether you are happy for the exchange to pass between us?

Hon. D J Bossino: Maybe we can have a discussion. My primary position that there would not be any difficulty.

75

Madam Speaker: Well, that would be my initial ...

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, we can have a discussion.

Madam Speaker: But we can speak behind the Speaker's Chair, to be sure.

80

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, indeed.

Madam Speaker: All right, let's proceed with Questions.

Questions for Oral Answer

MINISTER FOR HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q563/2024

Wheelchair maintenance – Teething problems resolved; and how

Clerk: Answers to Oral Questions continued.

85 Questions to the Minister for Health, Care and Business.
Question 563, the Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: In respect of wheelchair maintenance and the services being provided by Health Engineering, could the Government clarify whether the teething problems affecting this service have now been resolved and how?
90

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the wheelchair repair service is provided by the GHA.
95

On occasions when the GHA engineers are busy with repairs and maintenance to hospital critical clinical equipment, assistance is sought from contractors. Health Engineering has been providing this assistance.

100 I am assured the initial teething issues have been resolved, particularly the issue of spares. The GHA now holds stock of the most frequently required spares. Noting the wide range of wheelchair models on issue it is difficult to keep every spare possible. In the event that the GHA does not hold a spare, these are ordered and issue resolved usually within two weeks. All these spares are available to our contractors to attend to GHA wheelchairs as required.

105 **Madam Speaker:** Any supplementaries? Next question.

Q564/2024

Care Agency employees – Increasing/decreasing numbers

Clerk: Question 564. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Hon. Minister clarify how she intends to increase the number of carers employed directly via the Care Agency, and decrease the number of carers employed by subcontractors?
110

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the Care Agency is working closely with the Ministry of Employment in order to provide pathways into the role of Care Worker. This is in addition to the work that the Care Agency is already undertaking with the Department of Employment with respect to the recruitment of Care Workers.
115

120 The project with the Ministry of Employment aims to pool the training resources of the GHA
and the Care Agency to increase the local workforce by providing career opportunities and training
to those individuals who are currently out of employment.

The project will provide the trainees with the skills and aptitudes necessary to undertake the
role of Care Worker within the Care Agency and will help to minimise the Care Agency's reliance
on its subcontracted workforce.

125 It is envisaged that the project will commence with its first cohort of trainees in
September 2024.

Madam Speaker: Supplementaries?

130 **Hon. A Sanchez:** From that answer, is the Hon. Minister suggesting that we can expect a
recruitment drive for carers employed via the Care Agency around September 2024 period?

135 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, what I said is that the training, the courses will begin
in September 2024. So we are currently doing the groundwork with respect to how the trainees
are enrolled and subsequently contracted. But what we said is that the *training* will commence in
September 2024.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, Madam Speaker, the Hon. the Minister referred to the first cohort
of trainees starting on 24th September. Does she have a number at this stage?

140 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** I am being informed by my hon. colleague that the number is
around 202.

Hon. D J Bossino: And is she able to ... I understand that this may be more a question for her
hon. colleague, but is she able to advise this House: what period of training are we talking about?

145 This was the subject of some debate in their first term of office, when Minister Bossano had
certain ideas and policy initiatives in relation to this area, where he wanted to increase the local
complement of those individuals working in that area, where I think he was looking at a training
period of 11 months. But I would ask whether we are looking at a different period.

And if I may also, Madam Speaker, what the details of that training is going to entail?

150

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, we
are looking at it from an apprenticeship perspective. So there will be an initial six-month
programme where we will combine the Skills for Care course that they do at the Care Agency with
the one that they do at the GHA, in order to make one more cohesive care course. This will be an
apprenticeship of six months and then hopefully upon completion, they are able to get hired into
employment.

155

Hon. D J Bossino: So simply to home in on that and to understand it further, are we in effect
talking about a six-month period from commencement of training to full employment with the
Care Agency?

160

Hon. C P Santos: That is usually the length of the course. Then there are different levels that
they can choose to take on where they want to take a Level 2, Level 3, and if they want to continue
as a longer process. But the initial course, the Skills for Care course is currently a six-month training
course for the most basic of care workers.

165

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes. I am grateful to the Minister saying it is a course and so on.

170 Does this course end up with a particular accredited qualification? Is it an NVQ? And if it is, at what level, and so on?

Hon. C P Santos: I would need to find out what the actual qualification is. This is the course that is currently taking place at the GHA and at the Care Agency. It is just that we are combining
175 the way that it works, because at the GHA they get employed and then they get trained up. And then the training course happens at the Care Agency differently.

We are trying to make it one cohesive course so that we do not make it specific to one or the other organisation. So you become a care worker and you can either then get employed within the GHA or within the Care Agency.

180 As I said, I know there are Level 1, Level 2, Level 3 qualifications. This is just the basic care worker qualification.

Hon. E J Reyes: I think the Minister has undertaken to find out what the levels are going to be. But he has used the word 'basic'. The basic must be Level 1. You cannot be more basic than Level
185 1.

If that is correct, when the Minister carries out his investigations to report back to this House, can he then also inform us, is there going to be provision so that there is a progression for those who wish to and who are academically able to progress from Level 1 to Level 2 to Level 3, and so
190 on?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, this is already available at the School of Health, I think it is called, at the GHA. You are able to undertake the different levels and then further on into the university where they have the faculty of nursing over there. So there is already provision for this to actually be undertaken.
195

Hon. A Sanchez: And can the Hon. Minister clarify, would this reflect a proportional decrease in the reliance of subcontracted carers and an increase in the number of carers employed by the Care Agency?

200 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the idea is to do precisely that, to train up locals so that the locals can take up the roles.

Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

205 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Do the Hon. Members, in the plural, have any ideas as to what number they are going to pitch this at? This is, I think, the first year that they are doing this – I stand to be corrected – so we have a number of 20. And that is presumably as a result of interest expressed by people out there.

210 But is there a number that the Government is working towards as a matter of policy? Is there a target that they are looking at in order to achieve their policy objective, which is to increase the number of local workers working in the Care Agency and GHA and decrease the reliance on subcontracted workers?

Hon. C P Santos: That is precisely the aim, to increase the number of locals.

215 So the first cohort will be of 20 students. We are going to see how the course works and what the needs are. We have identified that we can go up to 120. So, as I said, we are still deciding on the final numbers according to how it goes.

220 We have not made a policy decision that we are confirming it is going to be 120 yet, but we have identified that we can at the moment, according to what the needs may be, with cover required for, what the full-time workers are and how many workers are required to cover what is sick leave and leave, and annual leave that there is a number of up to 120.

Now we still, as I said, need to look at the final numbers and confirm upon after taking in the first cohort.

225 **Hon. D J Bossino:** But the 120 is in relation to ... that is the course provision side of things. Is that correct? As opposed to the full complement of workers in these two particular Departments? I imagine it is the former, not the latter.

When he talks about 120, what is the Hon. the Minister referring to by way of complements?

230 **Hon. C P Santos:** With regard to a complement in either the GHA or the Care Agency, I think my colleague will be able to answer that better. What we have been working on is she will be able to give you who is on a fixed-term contract and what those numbers are.

235 What we have been looking at from a training perspective is the number of people that would be required as people who are currently subcontracted, not on fixed-term contracts with regard to be able to cover what is sick leave and annual leave, and what the rotation is of according to what the complement that we have and what the needs may be to cover. As you have been asking about subcontracted workers on this regard at this point.

Q565/2024
Total staff complements–
ERS sites and breakdowns of nationalities

Clerk: Question 565. The Hon. A Sanchez.

240 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Government provide the total staff complements for each of the following ERS sites: Mount Alvernia, John Cochrane, Hillside, and John Mackintosh Wing? Additionally, please include a breakdown of the ratio of nationalities in each site, categorised by:

1. Clinical staff, by rank
2. Administrative staff, by grade
- 245 3. Industrial staff, by title

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

250

Madam Speaker: All right, let's move on to the next question, and I will come back to this one.

Site	Type	Position	British	Ghanaian	Gibraltarian	Moroccan	Polish	Romanian	Italian	Bulgarian	South African	Spanish	
HILLSIDES	CLINICAL	ACTIVITIES ASSISTANT										1	
		ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR										1	
		CLINICAL MANAGER										1	
		HCA	1		2							56	
		PHYSIOTHERAPIST										1	
	ADMIN	QUALIFIED NURSE							1				18
		ADMIN	1										
	INDUSTRIALS/OTHER	HR MANAGER				1							
		CATERING MANAGER				1							
		COOK											2
		DOMESTIC				1	1						8
		GENERAL OPERATIVE				1							4
		HAIRDRESSER											1
		KITCHEN DOMESTIC											2
		SENIOR OPERATIONS MANAGER				1							
ACTIVITIES ASSISTANT					1							1	
	CLINICAL MANAGER											1	

JMW	CLINICAL	HCA		1	5						62	
		PHYSIOTHERAPIST					1					
		QUALIFIED NURSE					1				21	
	INDUSTRIALS/OTHER	ASSISTANT COOK				1						
		COOK									2	
		DOMESTIC		3							13	
		GENERAL OPERATIVE		1		1					3	
ADMIN	OPERATIONS MANAGER				1							
	RECEPTIONIST									1		
MOUNT ALVERNIA	CLINICAL	HEAD OF OLDER PEOPLE SERVICES				1						
		DEPUTY NURSING COORDINATOR		1							1	
		MATRON					1					
		SISTER / CHARGE NURSE		1		1					4	
		RGNS		2		3			1		1	21
		PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT									1	
		ENROLLED NURSE		1		10						
		NURSING ASSISTANTS		6		89						53
		PHYSIO I										1
		PHYSIO II										
		PHYSIO ASSISTANTS										1
		OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST					1					
		MEDICAL TEAM					1					2
		SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY		1								
	ADMIN	GDC GRADE I					3					
		GDC GRADE IV					1					
		GHA JUNIOR CLERK					1					
		AO					2					
		EO					2					
	INDUSTRIALS/OTHER	CATERING MANAGER					1					
		SENIOR COOK					2					
		INDUSTRIAL TECHNICIAN		1								
		COOKS					7				5	
		LABOURER					1					
		LABOURER GDC SKILL ZONE 2					1					
		MAINTENANCE					1					
		STORE MANAGER					1					
DOMESTICS - CATERING						3				2		
DOMESTICS						11				11		
DOMESTIC GDC SKILL ZONE 2					1							
LABOURER		1			11				2			
COCHRANE WARD	CLINICAL	SISTER / CHARGE NURSE		1								
		RGNS				1				7		
		NURSING ASSISTANTS		2		13			1		13	
		PHYSIO II				1						
	INDUSTRIALS/OTHER	PHYSIO ASSISTANTS				1						
	DOMESTIC				2					1		

Q566/2024

**Number of resident deaths –
Classified sudden/unexpected**

Clerk: Question 566. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government confirm the figures for the number of residents in Mount Alvernia, John Cochrane Ward, John Mackintosh Wing and the Hillside who have unfortunately passed away with their deaths classified as sudden or unexpected?

Could the Government please provide these figures, delineated by facility, month and the year for the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, historically, ERS has recorded total deaths but has not split the numbers between expected and unexpected deaths. In relation to deaths per facility per month, this information was requested and provided during the last parliamentary session.

From January 2024, ERS has started to collect the information by expected and unexpected deaths. This information is part of ERS's Quality Assurance process to identify any gaps in care.

The only unexpected death from January to date occurred when a resident passed away a week after admission to ERS.

270

Madam Speaker: Any supplementary questions?

Next question.

Q567/2024

**Mount Alvernia refurbishment –
Completion**

Clerk: Question 567. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government confirm when the refurbishment/remodelling of the third floor at Mount Alvernia will be completed?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): The refurbishment of the third floor is ongoing. This effort is part of a refurbishment plan that also includes the first and fourth floors at Mount Alvernia.

The GHA cannot commit to a deadline as these works are being conducted internally and any other emergency work will take precedence over these works.

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Madam Speaker: Next question. (*Interjection*)

Can I ask if the Hon. Member intends to ask a supplementary question, can you call my attention? Because otherwise I see you sitting there very quietly, and I do not know whether you intend to ask a question or not, if you do get my attention. Otherwise, I am going to move on.

290

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, I am grateful for that clarification. Especially since I recall asking the Hon. Minister whether a floor at Mount Alvernia was under refurbishment as a supplementary question.

295

I believe it was to 306/2024 in March this year, and I specifically recall the Minister saying that she received confirmation that there was no floor under refurbishment at Mount Alvernia, which I found very surprising because I visit the site quite frequently as a relative.

Given that now the Hon. Minister has clarified that there is indeed a floor under refurbishment, could she perhaps elaborate on the expected completion date or the time frame, perhaps, for the refurbishment? Because the progress does seem to be rather slow?

300

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as I just stated, we cannot commit to a deadline because these works are being conducted internally and any other emergency works are taking precedence. So the refurbishment works that the Hon. Lady refers to are making changes to ERS to make sure that all floors resemble as closely as possible the newly refurbished second floor.

305

We are incorporating dementia-friendly features, for example, and environments to ensure that all service users and residents can enjoy a more modern and vibrant living atmosphere.

They are changes that are being made incrementally. So, no, we cannot confirm when their deadline for these to be completed will be.

310

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have just heard that the floor is becoming more dementia friendly.

Could the Hon. Minister elaborate as to what features are in question?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I do not have the information. I am not able to comment on exactly what these features are.

320

Hon. A Sanchez: And can the Hon. Member clarify when she says that the works are being done internally, does she mean they are carried out in-house, as in they are not being outsourced to a company is what she means?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, Madam Speaker, that is what I mean.

325

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q568/2024
Letters before action –
Care Agency; ERS

Clerk: Question 568. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state how many letters before action have been issued to the following Departments/Agencies for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to present date:

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

335

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the number of letters before action issued to the Care Agency and ERS are as follows: 2020, there was one to the Care Agency and none to ERS; 2021 there were none to the Care Agency and two to ERS; 2022 there were none to either agency; 2023 there were none; and 2024 there were none.

Year	Care Agency	ERS
2020	1	0
2021	0	2
2022	0	0
2023	0	0
2024 (to date)	0	0

Madam Speaker: Next question.

340

Q569-70/2024
Number of claims issued –
Care Agency; ERS

Clerk: Question 569. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state how many claims have been issued against the following Departments and Agencies for the following years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to present date:

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 570.

Clerk: Question 570. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state the total value of the claims set out in the letters before action, and/or issued claims to and against, respectively, to the following Departments/Agencies for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to present date.

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the number of claims issued against the ERS and the Care Agency are as follows: 2020, there were none against the Care Agency or ERS; 2021 there were nine against the Care Agency and one against the ERS; 2022 there were 18 against the Care Agency and eight against the ERS; 2023 there was one against the Care Agency and none towards the ERS; and 2024 to date there were none.

Year	Care Agency Claims issued	ERS Claims issued
2020	0	0
2021	9	1
2022	18	8
2023	1	0
2024 (to date)	0	0

Just to carry on, sorry, to answer the remaining part of the question. The total values for the claims with regard to the Care Agency are €65,884.23 in 2022; and £120,884.22 in 2023.

Out of the nine claims detailed above with regard to ERS, only one has a value of £4,490 as detailed in the claimant's schedule of loss. One claim was issued and never served, and the value of the remaining seven is yet to be confirmed.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

375 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Sorry, Madam Speaker, if I may. The £10 million claim that was settled recently, is that outside this period? Was it before 2020, the £10 million settlement from the Care Agency?

And does the Minister have any information as to the source of that payment, which has been asked previously, which she gave an undertaking to the Leader of the Opposition.

380

Madam Speaker: Just a minute; just a minute. According to my recollection – and I may be wrong – I disallowed that question.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, but she is answering a question here on the Care Agency ... *[Inaudible]*

385

Madam Speaker: Yes, but the Hon. Minister is putting a question which is the specific question which was filed which I have disallowed. And there is no reference in these original questions to the source. And the Hon. Member is asking a specific question which was disallowed by the Chair. I am not going to allow you to put that question.

390

Hon. R M Clinton: Well, fine. But the Minister may, if she wishes, answer it.

Madam Speaker: No, because the question is not before the House.

395

Hon. R M Clinton: But the Minister has previously undertaken to answer it.

Madam Speaker: Well, then, the Minister may answer it as she has previously undertaken to do, but I am not allowing yourself to put that question. It has been previously disallowed and it is quite wrong of the Hon. Member to raise that question now when it has been disallowed. *(Interjection)*

400

No, the Minister cannot answer because the question is not properly before the House.

The Minister may write to the Hon. Member and give the information. And perhaps I am not going to go there. The information is outstanding. But the Minister may not answer the question, because the question is not properly before the House.

405

The Hon. Member should not have sought to essentially slip in that question, so I am disallowing that question ... You may answer on the first part of the question.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I assumed the claim was issued before 2020, which is why it is not included in these figures.

410

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q571/2024

Mental health services available to young people – To improve and develop

Clerk: Question 571. The Hon. G. Origo.

415 **Hon. G. Origo:** Madam Speaker, what is the Government proposing to do to improve and develop the services available to young people in areas related to health, mental health and well-being, as discussed at the second and third Youth Symposiums?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

420 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, we are remodelling how mental health and well-being services are provided to young people. In particular, our community mental health services will be undergoing significant changes, with a particular focus upon our young people to ensure that they receive appropriate support as and when required.

425 At the Youth Symposium general issues were discussed with those present, with the aim being to listen and to assist with the issues raised.

The Mental Health team have developed a close working relationship with the Department of Employment, establishing a structured supported employment programme promoting self-worth and financial independence.

430

Madam Speaker: Next question.

You need to ... I am not going to be asking the Hon. Members every time whether there are questions. You need to get my attention if you want to ask a question or jump up like other Members do. (*Interjection*) All right.

435

Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for her answer.

I picked up from her answer to my question that she said there was going to be some type of remodelling, I think is the word that she used. Can I ask her what changes this remodelling is going to have on the processes or the procedures? So, in other words, how are you going to ensure that young people get the support as and when required? I think is how she put it.

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez So as we spoke about in the motion that was debated, the Gibraltar Young Minds movement has a significant input to young people and how these issues are dealt with in relation specifically to young people. The Youth Symposium, however, to which the question relates is a slightly different issue in which we have a youth symposium to listen to the way that young people raise these issues and to listen to their concerns in relation particularly to these issues.

445

So my hon. colleague and myself had a couple of sessions through the Youth Symposium whereby we raised these concerns and we listened to a group of young people talk to us about the issues that they faced in relation to mental health issues in particular.

450

Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, grateful to the Minister for her answer. But the premise of my question is in relation to what the Government is going to do to improve and develop the services.

So taking, for instance, mental health of the 1 in 3 of the examples listed. How are you going to ensure that young people are getting the support?

455

So for instance, if the issues in relation to mental health support are not being adequately dealing with the numbers, then you may take the view that you are going to employ someone else. If the issue is related to the procedure or the referrals, then the position on the remodelling would be to change the way the process is being governed.

460

So have you taken a view on what you are going to address?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the question is specifically on how we aim to improve and develop the services, as discussed at the second and third Youth Symposium. However, notwithstanding that, I am very grateful for the opportunity to raise and speak about these issues because they are very relevant, and they are raised with us often.

465

So what we are doing and what we intend to do is that we are constantly listening to the needs of the service, and we are listening to the requirements. And, for example, we are looking at waiting times and looking at waiting lists and seeing what we need to do to reduce those waiting lists.

470 So, whether or not that arises from the Youth Symposium, which in this instance it did not, we are looking at that initiative, we are looking at several initiatives to see how we can improve that.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q572/2024
Regular pharmacy checks –
Prescriptions up to date and can be produced

Clerk: Question 572. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

475

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are regular checks being carried out on local pharmacies to ensure that registers of prescriptions are being kept up to date and can be produced if the need arises?

480

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, all community pharmacies were inspected in 2022 and will be re-inspected periodically as per UK standards. This is every three to five years.

485

Part of the inspection process involves ensuring that appropriate records are kept, including that of private prescriptions. Intelligence-led inspections are also carried out following complaints or any other information that may raise concerns.

490

Hon. J Ladislaus: Based on what the Hon. Minister has just said, can we take it then that ... it is every three to five years? Will there be an inspection next year then? Or will it be further along?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is every three to five years, so it depends on when it is deemed necessary. So within a three-to-five-year period of the last inspection it will be carried out. Three to five years from 2022.

495

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q573/2024
Health Information systems –
Vast number currently relied on

Clerk: Question 573. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.
Madam Speaker, what health information systems does the GHA currently rely on?

500

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA relies on a vast number of health information systems (HIS).

The main ones used by the majority of GHA clinicians are:

505

EMIS Web

Symphony
Modulab
Pacs/iCRIS
HIS – Health Information System
510 Evolve – EDMS
Bed Management
Frontdesk
Bighand Dictation system
R4

515 **Hon. J Ladislaus** Madam Speaker, as part of those systems do one of those systems involve data collection specifically?

520 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, EMIS web is a system which primary care uses to speak to secondary care, and that system is used to pick up information relating to a patient's prescriptions, clinical information, medical information and the records of the patient. So I think that is the particular system which the Hon. Lady is referring to.

525 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I imagined that each of the systems may have come at different times, but if not does the Hon. Lady have information as to when have these systems been in play?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I do not have the information as to when each of these systems was implemented. I know that EMIS was implemented in the past. My hon. colleague is not here, but I know that EMIS was implemented in the last eight years or so, but I cannot give an exact date.

530 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q574/2024
Visiting consultant clinics –
Systems access to records

Clerk: Question 574. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

535 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, when a visiting consultant is holding clinics at the GHA, are they given access to the GHA's health computer systems, to include patient records and prescription systems?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

540 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, visiting consultants are given precisely the level of access which they require to safely care for their patients. This varies between visiting consultants but would typically include access to patient's records.

It would be unsafe and in breach of accepted standards for this access to not be granted.

545 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am aware because I have spoken to various service users and also had a personal experience myself, that many of the visiting locums do not actually have access to a lot of the notes. I am not sure whether the Hon. Minister is aware of that, and I will share the experience just so that she can have the background and answer the question.

550 So recently I saw a visiting locum because the consultant was not available, because he was away from Gibraltar, and unfortunately he did not have full access, which then delayed the next person who was coming behind me because they had to search for those notes. That was the first part of the issue.

555 The second part was that he did not have access to actually prescribe, and therefore had to rely on a nurse practitioner to do so, which meant that I had to wait for 45 minutes because she had a caseload of her own of patients which she was dealing with.

So would the Hon. Minister commit to reviewing that system? Because I am not the only person, as I said, who has experienced it.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we are aware of there being several issues.

560 All consultants should get an induction which gives access to request and review blood tests, patient records and scans, for example. There have been odd occasions when passwords, for example, have expired and with some consultants more frequently than others because some consultants tend to come more frequently than others.

565 However, clinical informatics in the hospital in particular has been made aware of these issues; and clinical informatics has improved greatly and are now on call to receive these issues because we have indeed been made aware of these types of problems. So the system we hope has greatly improved recently.

570 And it is also to be borne in mind that GHA consultants, notwithstanding that a visiting consultant comes over from the UK and should have access to your record, the GHA employed consultant is still overly in charge of care and therefore should be on top of each and every patient that the visiting consultant sees, and therefore should pick up on any of these issues and report back to the GHA or indeed report back to the patient if necessary.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q575/2024

Sale of nicotine pouches – Plans to regulate or ban for under-21s

575 **Clerk:** Question 575. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are there plans to regulate the sale of nicotine pouches in Gibraltar to curb their use in the under-21 population, or to ban them altogether?

580 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

585 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, yes, the Government of Gibraltar are working closely with the Director of Public Health and other Members of the National Focal Point for Tobacco Control to review our approach to reducing the harm to our population from *all* forms of tobacco and nicotine.

We are holding a public consultation in September, where all forms of nicotine will be consulted upon to inform the development of future control measures, including tobacco pouches.

590 **Madam Speaker:** All right. Before we move on to the next question, I am going to go back to Question 565. Would the Hon. Mrs Sanchez or any other hon. Member have any supplementary questions?

595 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, as part of the information provided to the Hon. Minister, would she happen to have the figures for how many of these individuals are local residents?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, I need notice to that question. I do not have the information on me.

600 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mr Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

605 Looking at the schedule, I see that under Hillside and John Mackintosh Wing, on the coalition side, we have identified a number of qualified nurses. Yet when it comes to Mount Alvernia, I do not see anyone there as a qualified nurse. There is, however, an enrolled nurse. Is it meant to be the same? And perhaps the way the data has been provided to the Minister: if it is the same or if not, what is the difference?

610 And a qualified nurse, I do not know if the Minister is aware: what sort of qualification is it that they hold? Is it something that is an internationally accredited qualification, or is it something through adequate training provided locally, which is normally what one understands as enrolled nurse. I do not know if the Minister is aware of the details, or perhaps she could find it. But it does seem odd that in different facilities they have that difference.

615 And then I am surprised that in the Cochrane Ward there is a sister/charge nurse which one takes would be a well-qualified nurse person. Normally they are actually degree holders, and so on, with nursing assistance. But is there is no need to have any nurse because just to have one sister or charge nurse, that person would be physically impossible to be in attendance at the Cochrane Ward 24/7.

620 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately, it is not my role and it should not be my role to question the skills mix in each and every one of the wards. So we have qualified professionals that indeed inform these decisions, and it is best left to them.

In respect to the first question as to whether it is the same thing, the qualified nurse and the enrolled nurse, unfortunately I do not have that information on me, but I can find out.

625 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, for the honesty and information and I will be grateful whenever she can to finalise the answer through this House.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q576/2024

UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme – Applied in Gibraltar directly or inquiry held

630 **Clerk:** Question 576. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, will the UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme be applied in Gibraltar directly, or will the Government hold an Inquiry to reveal the extent of the harm caused locally?

635 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

640 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** I can confirm that the UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme *is* applicable to Gibraltar and that Gibraltar, as with other British Overseas Territories, has been included in the legislation.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q577/2024
Funding of hearing aids –
Current position

645 **Clerk:** Question 577. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Government state the current position with respect to the funding of hearing aids for those suffering from hearing impairment and associated conditions?

650 **Clerk:** Answer the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA provides behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids at no cost to the patients.

655 With patient's choice, some patients choose more discreet, smaller hearing aids, such as an in-the-ear (ITE). ITE hearing aids are subsidised, but patients contribute towards the overall cost.

Batteries are currently provided to the patients at the initial fitting of the hearing aid; however, they then purchase any subsequent batteries themselves. This is being looked into as part of the Government's Manifesto Commitments.

660 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am aware that – I apologise, I did not indicate that I wanted to ask the supplementary!

Madam Speaker, I am aware that in 2018 the GHA provided a standard hearing aid, the cost of which was £420. And as the Hon. Minister has stated, if the patient wishes a different model then they would have to pay the difference.

665 Can the Hon. Minister comment, or does she have the information as to how much the hearing aids are now?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Unfortunately, I do not have that information on me.

670 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Also, back in 2018 –

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I do, actually; apologies for that.

The cost of the GHA per hearing aid is £350. Most patients will receive two hearing aids, i.e. one per ear. And we see approximately 25 to 26 patients for new hearing aids fitting per month.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, in 2018, again, I am aware that patients were entitled to a new hearing aid every four years. Is that still the case?

680 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not know of any policy changes to that particular policy.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mr Reyes.

685 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I declare a vested interest as the daily user of a hearing aid. I know that in the past, reasonable repairs to the hearing aids was something that one could achieve via the system. Is that facility still available? Because I did try to report the matter in February and I am still waiting for any feedback or any indication. And my hearing aid does require some repairs. I do not know if the Minister is up to date. Or perhaps you could look into it for me?

690 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the policy is that the state-issued hearing aid is repaired by the GHA.

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Madam Speaker, the Minister did kindly say before that, as far as she was aware, there had not been a change of policy as that stated in 2018. But what I am saying is that the system does not seem to be working, you know.

Can the Minister enlighten us on what we sufferers of hearing aids need to do?

700 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I would suggest that he gets in touch with the relevant Department. I was not aware that there were going to be questions on the policy on the fixing of his particular hearing aid. Had I been so aware, I would have ensured that I was up to date with that information, but unfortunately I do not have that information to hand.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam, I am not going to... but perhaps the Minister and I can meet behind the Speaker's Chair. Because, yes, I would.

705 What I am trying to prove is that –

Madam Speaker: Unless there is a question, I do not want you to repeat the statement again. Is there a new question?

710 **Hon. E J Reyes:** My question to the Minister is fully understood. I tried to contact the relevant Department in February and they were going to find out. And one is still awaiting an answer.

The question is: does the Minister know why? I think it is no, but I would like to hear it.

715 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, it is *highly* unusual that the House is entertained by questions about a particular Member's own query about his particular own interest.

I think the Minister has generously answered the question in the generic sense: are repairs to hearing aids still handled? Yes, the policy has not changed. The State-issued hearing aid is repaired by the State where it is economically viable. I assume we sometimes replace it, if it is more economically viable to replace it. But I think it is a little outside what it is that one would expect to see in this House, to see an individual's Member's query pursued through his questions.

720 Can the Minister look into why my phone call in February has not been dealt with, is not something I have in my short experience in this House, when compared to the Hon. the Father of the House ever seen deployed as a question.

725 And in any event, Madam Speaker, we always wish to be helpful to hon. Members and to any citizen who approaches us, whether across the floor of the House or otherwise. And of course we will pursue the matter after the session, but I do not think it is appropriate to continue to pursue the hon. Member's *own* query about his *own* hearing aid. And we, of course, can have a chat about that later. And the Hon. Minister and I will pursue that.

730 But we will not be able, however, Madam Speaker, to assist him with his hearing aid, because neither she nor I are particularly technically expert in respect of hearing aids.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

735 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, if I may?

I think it is really not what my hon. colleague was trying to do was to pursue any line of inquiry in relation to his particular situation. I think he was giving it as an example of things that afflict a proportion of the population, and raising questions as to the effectiveness of the policy that the Hon. Minister had indicated remains the case.

740 I think it would be helpful for those people who are in the same predicament and are hearing the answers of the hon. Members opposite – and are welcoming the fact that there is a policy to deal with these issues, and that things have not changed, but question the effectiveness of it – to know where public information on these issues can be found. Because, otherwise, if public information was out there on these matters, we would not be raising questions in the House.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I do not accept for one moment what the hon. Gentleman has said about the nature of the questions put by Mr Reyes. Luckily, we do not have to rely on recollection. We have that little thing that we sometimes refer to as *El chivatito* which is a *Hansard* that will show us exactly what it is that Mr Reyes has said. And what he has said when he has got up for the third time, is that *his* query in February was not yet replied to. And what the Minister had done on the two times that she had got up was address the question generously in exactly the same way the Leader of the Opposition has now said it was meant to have been posed – that is to say, in the generic sense.

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But look, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Members on this side of the House receive queries from members of the public, either in our constituency work from the different districts that I have asked each Minister to look after or directly; and when something is going wrong, we very quickly tend to hear about it. It is not just *them* who receive complaints from members of the public when things start to go wrong.

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Now, if there was a problem with a number of people who have hearing aids, who are not able to get them repaired for a period of five months, I wager, Madam Speaker, that the Minister would have heard, *any* of us on this side of this House would have heard, and certainly No. 6 Convent Place would have received a number of complaints. We have not. So I do not accept for one moment that there are people in the same predicament as the hon. Gentleman – although *he* appears to have got himself into a predicament, but it is not something that he has raised with any of us since February, behind the Speaker's Chair, directly on the phone or otherwise.

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And so, Madam Speaker, we will simply refer the House to the fact that we think that we have a properly functioning system for the issue and repair of hearing aids through the GHA, through the facilities that are well known to people who require them.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q578/2024

Urgent specialist eye-care – Safeguards and protocols for time-sensitive issues

Clerk: . Question 578. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm what arrangements there are in place in respect of a service user who arrives at A&E or at the Primary Care Centre and requires urgent specialist eye care, and whether there are safeguards and protocols in place to ensure that time-sensitive issues are addressed without delay?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

780 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** From both an Emergency Department and Primary Care Centre perspective, anyone presenting with conditions requiring urgent specialist eye care are referred to the Eye Clinic within hours, or directly to the on-call Ophthalmologist out-of-hours. These referral pathways ensure that safeguards and protocols are in place to ensure that time-sensitive issues are addressed without delay.

785 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I simply ask this question because I recently received information that a particular service user had arrived at A&E and unfortunately it had not been dealt with in a time-sensitive manner. The user was informed, in fact, that a consultant was not going to come out at that time of night, I believe, around between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m.

790 And, therefore, I ask the Minister whether she is aware and whether she will address that issue?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we have an on-call ophthalmologist 24 hours a day. So indeed, if the ophthalmologist did not turn up or refused to turn up, we would be very grateful to know about that, because the on-call ophthalmologist is indeed paid to be on call 24 hours a day; and we have every reason to believe that they are there.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Simply for clarification, Madam Speaker, the information received was not that the ophthalmologist was not available, but rather that ... well, the point made by the individual was that whoever had seen her at A&E had stated: are we going to bring a consultant out at this time, rather than the ophthalmologist who is not there or not available?

I felt that it was necessary to clarify that point.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is about a needs-based assessment. If the person at A&E deemed that the ophthalmologist was to be called out the information that we are provided with is that the ophthalmologist *will* be called out. And indeed, I actually checked this out with A&E and they *do* call up the ophthalmologist on an as-needed basis. And the ophthalmologist, of course, does come when required by A&E.

810 I understand that there has been one such case in this last month that has been called out. So to our understanding, the ophthalmologist is on call 24 hours a day and does indeed go when requested by A&E. But it is indeed a judgement call on A&E's behalf as to whether the ophthalmologist is required or otherwise.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And can I ask just on that issue? So who makes that judgement call? Is that a judgement call made by a doctor on duty, or is it made by a specialist nurse who has got any training in eye conditions?

Who makes that judgement?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we rely on appropriate clinicians to make those judgement calls. So the Doctor at A&E would make that judgement call.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q579/2024
Bed shortages in St. Bernard's Hospital –
Action to alleviate

Clerk: Question 579. The Hon. J Ladislaus

825 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, has there been any bed shortages within any of the wards in St. Bernard's Hospital in the past five years; and if so what was done or is being done to alleviate the issue?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, St Bernard's Hospital has never been at 100% bed capacity in total in the last five years. There are occasions, especially during winter, when we experience bed pressures on individual wards, but we actively look to discharge medically fit patients to ensure we always have beds available.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q580/2024

Cervical screening programme – Up to date

Clerk: Question 580. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

840 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the GHA's cervical screening programme currently up to date?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

845 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, work is ongoing to review and improve the whole cervical screening pathway. There has already been a significant investment in nurse training, improving the IT call and re-call system and developing our in-country HPV laboratory testing capability and capacity.

850 The new consultant gynaecologist who commenced employment at the GHA on 29th January this year, has a special interest in cervical screening and is working closely with our Director of Public Health to improve the programme. The GHA recognises and accepts that there have been delays in women being able to book appointments for this important screening programme and does apologise for this. Work is ongoing reviewing the whole pathway.

855 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm, if she has that information, how many people have been screened in the past 24 months?

Madam Speaker: I do not have that information, but if the hon. Member emails me, I am happy to provide that information.

Q581-3/2024

Mammograms – Regular disruption; employment of mammographer

860 **Clerk:** Question 581. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Are mammograms currently being carried out by the GHA with regularity?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 582 and 583.

Clerk: Question 582. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Thank you.

Has there been a disruption to the GHA's breast screening programme within the past five years?

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Clerk: Question 583. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a mammographer?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, yes, mammograms are being performed regularly.

In the last five years we have stopped the mammography service due to COVID-19 and then again following the long-term sick absence of the breast radiologist as from 11th April 2024.

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This long-term sickness is being covered by a locum radiologist who commenced on 3rd June 2024.

The GHA currently has three full-time Radiographer Senior I Mammographers employed on indefinite contracts.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the point that between April to June the mammographer was on long-term sick leave. And it was only in June when we recruited a further specialist.

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So can the Hon. Minister confirm that between April and June, no mammograms were carried out?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we are talking about two different things here. We are talking about screening and people presenting to the GHA with symptoms. So if in that period there was anyone that presented to the GHA with symptoms, they were promptly and appropriately referred to a tertiary institution as required.

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So all mammograms required because of an intervention, or required because a patient was presenting with symptoms, were promptly dealt with by a tertiary institution.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the hon. Member then confirm that no, let's say, routine mammograms were carried out within the period of those two months. So that what I am trying to get at is whether perhaps something that may have been missed out in those two months, that may then have become more of a problem?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, again, we have to distinguish between the screening programme and the patients presenting with symptoms.

So if, again, a patient presented with symptoms, they were immediately and promptly referred to a tertiary institution. However, the screening programme is there to pick up any issues. But the people that are being screened are symptomless. So it is a routine programme.

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Routine mammograms were suspended during that two-month period, but anyone that was presenting with symptoms was immediately sent to a tertiary institution.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the clarification. Nevertheless, what I am getting at is that my understanding from looking at the subjects, I do not propose to be obviously an expert, but is

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that the mammograms, what they pick up is something that is not yet being able to be felt by the person who, unfortunately, has the cancer or perhaps the beginning of a tumour.

So what I am getting at is if there was no screening within those two months, could there have been something missed, therefore, given that there was no screening at all?

920 That is what I am trying to get at ...

Madam Speaker: The way the hon. Member has phrased that is a hypothetical question.

The first part of the question was all right but then you went into hypothesis. (*Interjection by Hon. J Ladislaus*)

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Hon. J Ladislaus: [*Inaudible*] ...that when the person had symptoms, the screening, there was no screening within two months.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I believe from the information presented to me, we do not have all the screening results from that period just yet, but we do have full callbacks within that period.

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But thankfully all were negative. Sorry, I am just thinking that through.

Those are the results that were picked up after that period was actually completed. So after June, we have had four callbacks, but all of them were negative. We do not believe so far that there are any negative implications from a hiatus of two months.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I think the question that arises, perhaps, is this one, which is that to the extent that there was an interruption to the routine screening programme between April and June 2024; and presumably, therefore, there were cancellations of appointments.

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Have those people now being given a new appointment?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that everyone who had a mammogram cancelled between April and June has now received their new appointment for the mammogram.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q584-5/2024

Menopause specialist –

Plans to recruit; specific clinic; talking therapies

Clerk: Question 584. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA employ a menopause specialist? If not, why? Are there any plans to recruit such a specialist?

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Is there a clinic that deals specifically with issues relating to perimenopause and menopause, both in uncomplicated and more complex cases?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 585.

Clerk: Question 585. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are talking therapies like counselling or CBT currently offered to service-users experiencing symptoms of perimenopause and menopause?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the GHA does not currently employ a BMS accredited menopause specialist but does have GPs and a Gynaecologist with special interest in this field.

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Menopause issues are seen in the well-woman clinic in the Primary Care Centre by GP with a special interest in menopause care. Complex menopause issues are referred to the Gynaecology Team in St Bernard's.

There are no plans currently to recruit a BMS-accredited menopause specialist though we are exploring training one of our team to this level and looking at how that individual would maintain the accreditation.

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Uncomplicated cases are seen in the well-woman clinic in PCC and complex cases are seen in the Gynaecology Department outpatient clinic in St Bernard's.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is offered for between six and eight sessions in Primary Care. This can be reviewed and extended if there is clinical need.

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Patients should attend their GP in the first instance and ask for a referral to be made. This referral is triaged by a group of psychologists and counsellors and a decision is made as to which of these professionals is best suited to offer therapy to the patient according to their specific needs.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, just to clarify, we do not currently have anybody who is an expert on menopause or perimenopause?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, one of the GHA Gynaecology Teams has undergone additional training in menopause care and has a special interest in the field, but has not undergone an accreditation. The issues relating to accreditation is that you need 100 patients with menopause issues in any given year to be able to maintain the accreditation; and given the size of the population, it is likely to be difficult for that accreditation to be met on an annual basis.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q586/2024

New catheterisation lab – Recruitment of cardiologists

Clerk: Question 586. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA have enough cardiologists and special cardiology nurses to staff the new Catheterisation Lab, which is expected to be finalised in the last quarter of this year? If not, will cardiology specialists be recruited in order to staff the Catheterisation Lab?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA currently has the following staff employed for the new Catheterisation Lab:

1 Consultant Cardiologist

1005 1 Associate Specialist
1 Physiologist substantive and 1 via locum agency

The following positions have been recently recruited:

1 Charge Nurse
1 Registered Nurse

1010 The GHA is currently in the process of re-advertising for the following posts:
1 Consultant Cardiologist
1 Radiographer SEN I
2 Radiographers SEN 2
2 Registered Nurses

1015 Which will ensure we have the appropriate trained staff for the new catheterisation facility, when the new facility is up and running.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q587/2024
New Oncology Suite –
Recruitment of specialist nurses

Clerk: Question 587. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1020 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, once the new Oncology Suite at the GHA – the plans for which were announced in February of this year – has been completed, will there be recruitment of specialist oncology nurses to staff the suite?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1025 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, we are advised by our clinicians that there is no need to employ new specialist oncology nurses with the opening of the new unit, as the current complement is sufficient to meet clinical needs.

1030 Current oncology service demands are audited with the focus on performance, compliance and implementation of improvements from a practice and resourcing perspective

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard from the announcement made as to the Oncology Suite that the chemotherapy area will increase from four to eight chairs, with two of those featuring private facilities and a dedicated bed for those requiring acute medical attention.

1035 There will be an increase in clinical rooms from two to four, thereby increasing capacity for one-to-one patient consultation, and there is a clear increase in resources, Madam Speaker, and the services that will be available locally to patients, which of course is very welcome.

1040 So can the Hon. Minister please confirm if they will review whether any further oncology specialists will be needed in order to staff this? Because it does seem to me like the resources are certainly increasing significantly.

1045 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am very happy to talk about the Oncology Suite all day, if the Hon. Lady wishes me to, it is one of the features that we are very proud of, because we actually want patients to be far more comfortable here in their home whilst receiving treatment. So the Oncology Suite was always driven by comfort rather than anything else.

We are told by our clinicians that currently we do not need more staff in the Oncology Unit, so we are obviously going by what the clinicians tell us. However, the Future Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy does include the recruitment in-house, of several registered nurses.

1050 So I am very happy to say that there is a strategy in place to look to cover that need if and when it arises. But currently we are told that notwithstanding the fact that we are increasing the resources to make the patients here in Gibraltar far more comfortable, we are told that with the resources we have, it is actually adequate to cover the care of Gibraltarians in their home.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can I just ask on that last answer the Minister gave? 1055 Because, no need to recruit more staff now, but as part of the nursing strategy, I think she said, there was a plan to recruit several registered nurses in-house. I think she used that phrase.

What does that mean? Does that mean new posts, or does it mean appoint nurses from within the existing complement?

1060 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I spoke about a Future Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy, which means that all of these questions will be reviewed as and when the need arises.

The aim at the moment is to simply see how it goes as and when the Oncology Unit opens. But the oncologists at the moment, and the workforce in the GHA are already looking at the Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy, but unfortunately they have not developed the specifics in order for 1065 me to be able to answer that question properly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q588/2024

Employment of radiologists – Complement intact over past 12 months

Clerk: Question 588. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1070 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a Radiologist/Radiologists? If so, it is the complement of radiologists intact and has it been intact in the past 12 months?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1075 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, there are currently four full-time consultant radiologists in employment. Due to unforeseen circumstances, a further two consultant radiologists have been employed as locum to cover absences within the Department. These have commenced on 3rd June and 10th June respectively.

The complement of consultant radiologists has now been increased to five, with a successful candidate arriving at the GHA on 8th July. 1080

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have just heard that there has been a recruitment of two further to cover long-term absences. Can the Hon. Minister confirm what these absences are due to, and whether they are medical in nature or perhaps due to burnout?

1085 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the cover required is due to sickness, which is expected to be long term and will need to be managed accordingly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q589-90/2024

**Full or part-time employment –
Diabetologist; endocrinologist; specialist diabetes nurse**

Clerk: Question 589. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ the following on a full-time or part-time basis?

- (i) A diabetologist
- (ii) An endocrinologist
- (iii) A specialist diabetes nurse

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 590.

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Clerk: Question 590. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, have there been any disruptions to the regular functioning of the diabetes clinic at the GHA within the past five years, to include any instances where the service has lacked specialist clinicians within this area?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker the GHA does not currently employ or foresees the need to employ a diabetologist.

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The GHA has the following employed on a full-time basis:

- (i) 1 Consultant Physician who is an endocrinologist
- (ii) 1 Diabetes Specialist Nurse in Paediatrics
- (iii) 2 Locum Diabetes Nurse Specialists in Adults
- (iv) 1 Registered Nurse completing the specialist training in diabetes care.

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The Diabetic service encompasses a range of services and conditions and as such there is not a single standalone diabetic clinic. The Diabetes services has never ceased delivering services to the community.

The Diabetes service has continued with dedicated specialist nurses. Furthermore, we have had general nurses with diabetes training working with the team addressing the Annual Diabetes Review Clinic, the dedicated mobile phone service and for the last two years we have, on a full-time basis, re-initiated the Diabetes Retinopathy screening service.

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Recently, there has been a two-week hiatus period between one endocrinologist and his replacement arriving, but this is within normal practice and other medical consultants were able to provide medical cover for diabetic emergencies. And, as a consequence, there has been no disruption to patient services.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, the information that I have had is that at certain points – and I do have information that service users have suffered this impact – the service did not have a specialist nurse available or indeed a doctor, at some point in recent years. I cannot pinpoint the exact dates.

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Does the Hon. Lady have knowledge of this? And what will be done in future to avoid this happening again?

1135 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have just pointed out, there was a two-week gap in the service. So we had an endocrinologist who went on sabbatical; there was a locum covering that person, that locum handed in his notice. So between that locum post being covered, there was a two-week period of absence, which is effectively the same as a consultant going on annual leave. So what happened was that other physicians and other consultants covered that two-week period.

1140 So yes, there was a hiatus in the service, but that was promptly covered. We now have a new endocrinologist on site seeing patients as is the norm.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q591/2024
Formal contracts –
Expiration; renewal

1145 **Clerk:** Question 591. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: How many GHA employees are currently working without a formal contract in place, or with a contract that has expired and not been formally renewed?

1150 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there are no employees working at the GHA without a formal contract.

1155 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately I am hearing of too many instances where employees are actually working with expired contracts or even with none at all for extended periods of time. This has obviously a number of impacts to the service: issues with insurance; issues with employment; issues, potentially, with continuity of care.

1160 Can the Hon. Minister confirm that everyone working within the GHA currently has an up-to-date written contract?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the information provided to me by the Director of Workforce, when these questions were submitted, was that there are no employees working at the GHA without a formal written contract in place.

1165 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q592/2024
Corporate Governance Framework –
Policy in place

Clerk: Question 592. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm whether the GHA has a Corporate Governance Framework or policy in place?

1170 **Clerk:** The Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the GHA has a comprehensive Corporate Governance Framework in place. Given the complexity and size of the GHA, our governance framework is multifaceted, ensuring robust
1175 oversight and effective management across all levels.

Our governance structure includes the Board of Directors, the Executive Team and various Board subcommittees, each with defined roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability and transparency. Additionally, we have specialised groups such as the Review of Harm Group, which focuses on patient safety and quality of care, and uses Datix and Patient Safety Investigation
1180 analysis for incident reporting and risk management.

A critical component of our governance framework is the Corporate Risk Register, which systematically identifies, assesses and monitors risks across the organisation. This register is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that emerging risks are managed proactively. Complementing this is our Board Assurance Framework, which provides a structured approach for
1185 the Board to obtain assurance that key risks are being effectively managed and that our strategic objectives are being met.

We integrate overarching corporate policies with divisional and departmental practices through standard operating procedures. This ensures consistency in governance whilst allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to the specific needs and dynamics of different departments.
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Our framework also emphasises continuous improvement and compliance with regulatory requirements, guided by NHS standards and best practices. This dynamic interplay between our governance bodies and operational practices enables us to maintain high standards of clinical and corporate governance and deliver exceptional care to our patients.

In summary, while there is not a single document encapsulating our entire governance framework, our system is robust, interlinked and designed to ensure effective oversight, risk management and quality assurance across all levels of the organisation. This therefore allows us to balance risk across workforce, quality, safety and finances.
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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard about the complexities and how it is multifaceted, yet I am aware that the NHS has such a document and the NHS is obviously far bigger than the GHA is. And those documents or that document is actually available to the public in the UK. So the public here would expect public bodies to be well-run and openly accountable.
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Does the GHA therefore have any plans to collate all these multi-facets into one document that is then available to the public as and when asked for?
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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, if we do not, we will presently.

I am aware that there is a clinical governance organogram and as the Hon. Member will be aware, we are making as many documents as possible published on our website. So I am perfectly happy not to commit to a timeframe, but to commit that this is something that should be done.
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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Are the documents that the Hon. Lady mentioned in her original answer, are they currently available? One of the documents I was interested to hear about was that she says there is a Review of Harm Group, so presumably that group might have some correlation with issues of patient complaints, or something like that might review individual cases and so on.
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It would be interesting for people to be aware how they go about or how that works – not how they go about contacting their group, because clearly that is not necessarily desirable – but how that group functions in relation to issues such as that when they are investigating a matter which is referred through the complaints process, for example.

But there may be other processes that the public, as my hon. Colleague says, quite rightly, would be interested in.
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1225 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Review of Harm Group meets, I believe it is weekly to review all cases. So the way that it works is that all cases are collated through PALS – the Patient Advisory and Liaison Service – or through the Complaints Office in the Ministry are passed through there. So the staff that deals with complaints and the Ministry and the staff in PALS meet regularly with the clinical governance managers in the GHA to review each and every complaint that is made to the GHA through PALS or through the Ministry.

1230 **Madam Speaker:** Hon. Mr Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

1235 The Hon. Minister comments on the robust corporate governance and mentions the Risk Register. On the subject of the Risk Register, would the Hon. Minister be able to inform us how long the average waiting time is for the risks detailed or highlighted to be solved and successfully addressed?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as this House may be aware, there was the first board meeting last week where I sat along with the current Chair, Prof. Ian Cumming on the board. And I can confirm that the risk register was presented to the board.

1240 Can I confirm the length of time that it takes for something to be off the risk register? No, and I need specific notice of that question.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Sacarello. I will come to the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus in a minute.

1245 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much for your reply.

Just for the public, would the Hon. Minister be able to confirm that this would be a priority? It has come to our notice that there is a significant delay and lapse in addressing some of these risks, and I would ask the Minister to confirm if she would give it her undue attention to ensure that this time lag is reduced?

1250 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Risk Register, as the name itself says, is something which the board of the GHA gives its utmost attention.

There is a disconnect here between the complaints made, which are addressed through the Review of Harm Group, PALS and the Complaints Office and the Risk Register. The Risk Register identifies *global* risks rather than specific issues.

1255 So the issues on the Risk Register are global issues, item by item, which need to be addressed by the GHA. And obviously this is something which the board and the executive board of the GHA takes very seriously and sits and reviews each and every time it meets.

1260 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the subject of the Risk Register, is that document available to the public?

1265 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, that document is not a public document.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, for what reason is it not public? And will the Hon. Minister commit to making this document public?

1270 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Lady has referred to documents that are published in the NHS. I am sure that the corporate risk register, the NHS, is not published in the NHS. This is not a document which is usually published.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q593-4/2024
Staff succession planning –
Contingency plans

1275 **Clerk:** Question 593. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA have succession planning in place in respect of its staff?

1280 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 594.

1285 **Clerk:** Question 594. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Does the GHA have contingency plans in place in respect of its staff?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1290

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Health Authority has recently drafted a Workforce and People Strategy which acknowledges current challenges and outlines plans to address them. The GHA is now developing future plans based on projected workforce needs over the next 5, 10, 15 and 20 years.

1295 As the hon. Member will appreciate, post-COVID, the healthcare sector worldwide has been turned on its head with global shortages reported by the World Health Organisation. Gibraltar, unfortunately, is not exempt from these challenges. However, the organisation is collaborating with stakeholders to build the necessary resilience.

1300 In February this year, a team of professionals from the GHA participated at the Future Pathways Career Event hosted at Bayside and Westside secondary schools, and the GHA is currently working with the Ministry of Youth for a careers fair later this year focusing on academic and non-academic grades aimed at children who will be choosing their GCSE options, as well as those currently employed who may wish to consider a career change.

1305 Furthermore, the University of Gibraltar is operating at full capacity with nursing students in general nursing and mental health nursing. Newly qualified nurses coming into the healthcare sector will benefit from further on-the-job training to fill existing or anticipated specialised skill gaps.

1310 Madam Speaker, the GHA is undergoing a significant transformational journey thanks to the investment and support of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. In September, the Masters in Advanced Healthcare Practice will be laying the foundations locally to develop and train the current workforce, thereby reducing the reliance on locums.

Madam Speaker, on 18th June the Gibraltar Chronicle published what appeared to be an interview from the hon. Member. I have refrained from responding publicly out of respect for this House, given that the related parliamentary questions had already been filed.

1315 It is essential that healthcare debates rely on accurate and reasonable information. Sensationalising issues without clear understanding is counterproductive. For instance, junior doctors serve two- to three-year periods before continuing their training. This is not a revolving

door but is a stepping stone for clinicians growing and developing their careers and is common throughout jurisdictions.

1320 The GHA *does* face recruitment challenges in certain specialised areas, such as diabetes specialist nurses. In these cases, recruiting locums is necessary to ensure that these positions remain available so that local talent and services are not affected.

I have also agreed with the GHA and Unite for both parties to undertake a review of the Agenda for Change Agreement. This will allow for an infrastructure that is aligned to the NHS.

1325

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the subject of the revolving door can the Hon. Lady or does the Hon. Minister not accept that we do unfortunately have a revolving door of at least GPs?

1330 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, again, junior doctors, it is quite common for junior doctors to come and train for a while.

It is actually Government policy to ensure that locums are kept at a minimum and we employ people on fixed-term contracts so that we employ GPs and consultants on fixed-term contracts. This is this is a specific topic which I will be addressing in the budget debate later on in this month.

1335 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Given that all these systems have been put in place now, and I am glad to see that there are systems and that succession planning is being looked into: can the Hon. Lady accept that, unfortunately, what was done previously is now impacting upon the GHA in terms of a lack of succession planning?

1340 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, we are still recovering from what we found in 2011.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q595/2024

Service-user waiting time – Seeing counsellor from referral date

Clerk: Question 595. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1345

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what is the current average waiting time for a service user to see a counsellor at the GHA, from the date of referral?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1350

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, as at the end of May 2024, the average waiting time to see a counsellor is 15 weeks. This represents an 82% decrease in the average waiting times in the last 12 months, a reduction from 86 weeks to 15 weeks in median waiting times.

1355

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, for what reason is there still a waiting time of 15 weeks? Surely individuals who need counselling, need it a lot quicker than within 15 weeks.

We did have six trainee counsellors who were available and whose contracts were unfortunately not renewed in May of this year. Can the Hon. Minister confirm whether there is a lack of resources, of human resources?

1360

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of the six particular counsellors or the reasons why their contracts were not extended.

1365 Do we think that 50 weeks is not sufficient? We have recently been on a viewpoint programme where this issue was discussed at length. So we are in the process of reducing waiting times, trying to reduce the waiting lists which are in place. And what we are looking to do is once those waiting lists are reduced, to reduce those waiting times significantly.

But I do agree with the Hon. Lady that 15 weeks is not a good place to be.

1370 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, simply on the point that the Hon. Minister is not aware of, the six trainee counsellors, I believe that that point was addressed in the viewpoint by the Minister herself.

Perhaps she could clarify the reason why those counsellors did not continue and their contracts were unfortunately ended in May?

1375

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I believe that the Hon. Lady is referring to the trainee counsellors that provided the 100 hours of training. Those are not in a contract with the GHA. We were providing training for those counsellors and they were given those 100 hours in respect of training. So what we have committed to do – and we have actually got a meeting set up in the next couple of weeks with the trainee counsellors and the psychologists and the clinical leader of the Psychology Department at the hospital – is that we are providing a specific programme for those counsellors to undergo before the programme is resumed.

1380

So there is a structured programme that we are looking to put in place. And we are actually looking to re-engage with the counsellors.

1385

But in order to clarify my previous point, the reason that I did not address the question is because they have not been formally contracted by the GHA. It is an agreement whereby we have provided training for those counsellors, effectively.

1390 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** My understanding is that those counsellors had seen 45 service users already within their time in the GHA.

For what reason, therefore, could they not continue seeing those service users in the meantime while that programme was put in place?

1395 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** We are looking to improve that programme and put certain structured improvements in place. We have been advised by the clinical lead that he wants to put in place a structured programme, whereby he also provides training to these counsellors.

So as I just commented, we are putting in place a structured programme with them and we are sitting with them in the next two weeks in order to try and find a workable solution to this.

1400 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q596/2024
Service user triage –
Time seeing psychologist

Clerk: Question 596. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: On average, how long does it take a Registered Mental Health Nurse employed by the GHA to triage a service user before they see a psychologist at the GHA?

1405

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, a registered mental health nurse does not triage a patient for psychology services.

1410 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister perhaps confirm who *does*, because it is simply my understanding from the actual reports carried out by the Mental Health Board that that was the case. Perhaps I have misunderstood.

1415 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the nurse refers to the Talking Therapies Team and the Talking Therapies Team then triages each and every referral that is made.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q597-99/2024

**Mental Health Annual Inspection Report –
Psychological Services and Talking Therapies professionals**

Clerk: Question 597. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1420 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department currently composed of the following professionals, as set out in the Mental Health Annual Inspection Report 2023:

- Head of Psychological Services and Talking Therapies and Clinical Psychologist - at Ocean Views. Inpatient services and Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at PCC - Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at Community Mental Health Team - Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at Children's Health Centre - Gibraltar Young Minds Counselling Psychologist
- Counsellor at Ocean Views and Children's Health Centre - Adult primary care talking therapies and Gibraltar Young Minds
- Counsellor, part-time, at Primary Care Centre - Adult primary and secondary care talking therapies
- One trainee Clinical Psychologist
- Six trainee Counsellors, part-time - Adult primary care talking therapies, various locations?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1425 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 598 and 599.

Clerk: Question 598. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1430 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, of the 136 service users on the legacy waiting list to access the services provided by the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department, how many responded to the opt-in exercise carried out in order to deal with the waiting lists from 2019 to December 2022?

Of those that responded, how many (1) opted in; and (2) opted out?

1435

Clerk: Question 599, the Hon. J Ladislaus:

1440 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Since the introduction in 2022 of enhanced data recording on EMIS within the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department, what are the rates of referral to the Department been, broken down by month?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1445 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the current staffing structure is slightly different since the board carried out their review. It is currently as per the below.

So the Head of Psychological Services and Talking Therapies and Clinical Psychologist – at Ocean Views – and Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies.

Clinical Psychologist is based at the Community Mental Health Team and the adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies is an Inpatient.

1450 The Counselling Psychologist is at Ocean Views and that is the Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies.

The Clinical Psychologist is based at Ocean Views, so that is Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies and Children’s Health Centre, Gibraltar Young Minds.

1455 The Clinical Psychologist is based at the Children’s Health Centre, so that is under Gibraltar Young Minds.

The Assistant Psychologist is based at the CMHT; that is Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies and the CHC for the Gibraltar Young Minds. There are counsellors at Ocean Views and the Children’s Health Centre; so the Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies and the Gibraltar Young Minds and Maternity.

1460 There is a counsellor at the PCC and that is Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies.

There is a counsellor part time at the Primary Care Centre, again, that is Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies. And there is one trainee clinical psychologist.

A total of 49 patients responded to the opt-in exercise, carried out. The exercise only required patients to opt in.

1465 And in answer to Question 599, robust data quality was established from November 2023 onwards. These figures are as follows:

- The number of referrals in November 2023 are 47
- The number of referrals in December 2023 are 31
- January 2024 – 39
- 1470 • February 2024 – 52
- March 2024 – 40
- April 2024 – 57
- May 2024 – 36

1475 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In the Mental Health Boards Reports, it was suggested, or the board was given information to suggest that that the complement, as I read out, would be the complement moving forward. Can the Hon. Minister clarify, therefore, why it is that at that point in time, the issue with the six trainee counsellors was not addressed, so that we would have known by that point in time – or the board would have known by that point in time – that there would be a lack of those six trainee counsellors available?

1480

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the issue with the six trainee counsellors and the 100 hours is an issue that has been taken under review by the Clinical Manager of the Psychology Services. So the Clinical Director of the Talking Therapies has made a judgement on wanting to review that service and indeed structure it slightly better.

1485 In November, I am not quite sure what was happening, I am not quite sure what was going on at the time, but today in June 2024, the clinical lead for talking therapies has made a judgement call that he wants to have a structural review on it and he wants to have a more structured programme in place. I think it is to be applauded that he is looking to improve the programme with 100 hours that are looking to be offered by the counsellors.

1490 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify – I do not know whether she has got this information. What will happen to the 45 service users that were being seen to by the trainee counsellors?

1495 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Unfortunately, I do not have that information to hand, but I assume that they will continue to be seen by the service, they will be picked up by the service. And indeed, any such improvements are simply for the best interests of the patients.

So we are looking to restructure the programme in order to ensure better service for the patients.

1500 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, a question or supplementary on Question 598.

So we have heard that there was an opt-in opt-out system. It is or has been commented on within the board's latest reports that that was an imperfect system or strategy to manage waiting lists. What will be done in future if, unfortunately, the waiting lists grow to the same levels or there are further delays? What strategy will be implemented at that point in order to address the waiting lists?

1505 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we are looking to address the waiting lists so these issues do not arise again in the future.

1510 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister clarify whether the people who did not opt in are being called, whether that has been followed up? Because perhaps it is the case, of course, that such a long time has elapsed that they may have sought some specialist care, private care elsewhere.

1515 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Sorry, was the question in relation to those who have opted in?

The exercise required patients to opt in, so it is assumed that those who did not opt in have either determined they do not require the service, or they have sought follow-up care elsewhere.

1520 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, perhaps the wrong assumption would be made.

So can the Hon. Minister confirm whether those people were actually followed up on, or whether there are plans to follow up on those individuals, because it could be a number of reasons why they have not responded. Perhaps they have not received the communication. There could be 101 reasons.

1525 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, indeed, there could be 101 reasons.

The exercise was an opt-in exercise, where each and every person on the list was contacted and asked to opt in. Is it a perfect system? As a Mental Health Review Board stated itself, it is an imperfect system, but it is a system that we are currently working with. So the exercise requires patients to opt in to the service.

1530 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask how people were contacted? Is this, were they actually spoken to? Or is it they have just received a letter and it is being assumed that they received it; and it is being assumed that they understood it, and it is being assumed that they have no issues?

1535 If there is more of a personal interface, I can understand how, with that system, you could reach the conclusion that it has been very clear.

Does the Minister know whether there has been any personal contact when people were given the chance to opt in?

1540 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not know whether people were called personally to do so. What I do know is that the service in relation to text messages, etc. has improved significantly recently, and people are communicating far better in terms of being reminded of appointments, in terms of being communicated with the GHA on a regular basis.

So I assume that they were contacted via phone, but I do not know the exact means.

1545

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, but what is the relevance of that explanation? Is there an assumption that they did not even get a letter? That they might have just got a text saying, 'You have the right to opt in'. And people do not even really understand what that means?

1550 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have stated, I do not know the exact means of communication. If you want clarification on the exact means of communication, I suggest that you give me notice of the question and I will happily seek the information that you request.

1555 However, the point that I was trying to make is that we are contacting patients at the moment via text messages and the system is proving incredibly successful in terms of contacting people via text message. So even if they were contacted via text message, we are seeing significant uptake of that service by patients generally.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q600/2024

Unregistered/unlicensed interventions – Commercial activity; fines

Clerk: Question 600. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1560

Hon. C Sacarello: Could the Government please provide a breakdown of interventions where its labour inspectors, customs officers or other Government officials have questioned and/or apprehended individuals or companies conducting commercial activity in Gibraltar while not being registered or licensed locally?

1565

Please list this activity monthly, for the last six months, including a separate column for fines issued to each entity per month and another column for fines actually settled by each entity per month.

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1570

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, in January 2024, there were zero apprehensions, two questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

1575

In February 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, zero fined issues and zero fines settled.

In March 2024, there were zero apprehensions, zero questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

In April 2024., there were zero apprehensions, six questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

1580

In May 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, zero fined issues and zero fines settled.

In June 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, three fines issued, and zero fines settled.

	Apprehensions	Questioning	Fines Issued	Fines Settled
January 2024	0	2	0	0
February 2024	0	3	0	0
March 2024	0	0	0	0
April 2024	0	6	0	0
May 2024	0	3	0	0
June 2024	0	3	3	0

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the Hon. Minister for her answer.

1585 The reason behind this question is obvious, it is to do with protecting local businesses. There is an unlevel playing field being created here where businesses who are not as exposed to the high set-up costs and high running costs for businesses locally and all the rigorous requirements that they go along with it, are entitled – sorry, where other businesses are coming in and undercutting them on price?

1590 This is a problem that has been going on for years now. We understand that there are delicacies with negotiations and it has been alluded to by the Opposition.

But my question to the Hon. Minister is: does she not see that this is doing the local business community a disservice? And as Minister responsible for that portfolio, is she going to do anything about it?

1595

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member opposite was deputy whilst himself and myself used to fight these issues in the GFSB. So we are very well aware of the issues that we used to fight shoulder to shoulder in respect to these issues.

1600 In fact, what the figures reflect is that because of these interventions ... the businesses are given a 28-day period to regularise their position. So when we look at all these questions, what has actually happened is that businesses have been questioned, they have regularised their position and therefore they have not been fined.

So what we are seeking to do is to seek to increase the level of interventions that we do on a month-by-month basis, as indeed you can see from the figures provided.

1605 So we are looking to question or to apprehend businesses and indeed to fine them, if it is necessary. We will not fine a local business and indeed it is not necessary, and they do regularise their position in a timely manner.

1610 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure if I understood what the Minister said about fining local businesses. My question was really geared towards some of the businesses coming over the border. But nonetheless, I still think that these figures are low, certainly in terms of the apprehensions, and in some months they had zero.

And also in the case of the fines being collected they are all zero. Has this been addressed? And are any of these foreign entities? In which case: how does the Minister purport to pursue those?

1615

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: As I have stated, the number of businesses questioned and the number of businesses that have regularised their position is that which is reflected in the figures. So all of the businesses which have been questioned recently have indeed regularised their position immediately, which I am pleased to say.

1620 In respect of what we are doing, in terms of other businesses, and especially businesses coming across the border, as the Hon. Member will be aware, that is a longer term plan and requires a longer term strategy. And we are indeed looking to different methods to regularise those positions.

1625 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Sorry, but in terms of the latter part, the second limb of my question, which you may not have heard, referred to – I will just repeat it – referred to in terms of the collection of the fines if they are a foreign entity. How does the Government purport to go about collecting those fines if indeed they have no jurisdiction in or across the border?

It is not hypothetical ...

1630

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, that sounds to us like a hypothetical question.

Hon. C Sacarello: It is easily resolved. How is it done currently?

1635

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, we do not appear to have a situation where we have not been able to enforce a fine against a foreign entity. But I am not going to give the hon. Gentleman legal advice.

1640 If a debt is owned by an entity outside of Gibraltar, there are provisions for service outside the jurisdiction. There is provision for enforcement outside of the jurisdiction, etc., etc.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q601/2024
Port Launch –
Operational**

Clerk: Question 601, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Port Launch operational?

1645

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GTA Port Launch 'Mons Calpe' is currently operational.

1650

Hon. D J Bossino: As the Minister says, currently, is there any point in time when it was not operational in the recent history?

1655 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I will do the Hon. Member's homework for him. We actually have two Port Launches and there is one of which is not operational. So we have a Port Launch which is called the *General Elliott*, which is not operational, and that continues to not be operational.

1660 We are looking to see whether, in fact, the reinstatement value or the fixing value of the launch is such that it would cost us too much to fix that launch. So we need to either buy a new one or enter into a higher purchase agreement with a company. So we are exploring those options.

The smaller launch was non-operational for a period of time but is now currently operational.

1665 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it the case that there was a period of time when the port did not have an operational launch available to it? Is that a reasonable conclusion that one can surmise from the answer that she has given?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: That is correct, Madam Speaker.

And I am informed that is the situation that we inherited in 2011 – much, though, that I hate to hark back to 2011.

1670

Hon. D J Bossino: Hon. Minister ought to hate to harp back to something that happened 12 years ago. And she is praying in aid, something, a state of affairs that was the case 12 years ago. But be that as it may. And then they say that we get riled on this side of the house, for goodness sakes, when we get treated to those type of answers.

1675

Can she give us information as to what the cost analysis is? Does she have that information available? In other words, what will it cost them to fix the laundry? I cannot remember the name of the launch. *(Interjection)*

The what?

1680

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): The *General Elliott*.

Hon. D J Bossino: The *General Elliott*. How much will it cost? And how much will the replacement cost be?

1685

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman is getting railed. *(Interjection)* Or riled. He told me across the floor of the house that what the GSD had left us was a golden legacy. *(Laughter)* So when the Hon. Lady refers him to what we inherited in 2011, I would have thought that what his ears would hear was a reference to the golden legacy, and no reason to get riled.

1690

In any event, what I heard from the Hon. Lady myself, when she was answering him, was that we were awaiting a quotation of the cost if what repairing the *General Elliott* would be. So if we are awaiting a quotation we cannot answer his supplementary.

1695

Hon. D J Bossino: I asked two questions. One had to do with the cost of repair. Is that the quote that she is waiting for? And the other question related to the cost of replacement.

Does she have that information available to her now, which she can share across the floor of the House. And I will ignore the more barbed political statements, which is the want of the Chief Minister as usual in these occasions.

1700

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, he can ignore me as often as he likes. But the hon. Gentleman is fixed with the things that he has said. I have never considered it barbed to be referred to the legacy that they left us. I will have a lot to say about it during the course of the budget debate.

But the specific answer to both of his specific questions is in the negative.

1705

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q602/2024

Preparation of Development Plan – Work commencing

Clerk: Question 602. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1710

Hon. D J Bossino: When will work commence for the preparation of the Development Plan?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1715 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, work on the development plan is expected to start within the next couple of months.

Hon. D J Bossino: So is it the – and I am drawing from the public statements that have been made in relation to this – is it the expectation that the plan will, after that two-month period, then be ready within a period, I think it was of two years.

1720 Is that understanding correct? So, in effect, what we are looking at is a time period from now to when the plan is ready and available of about 14 months. Is that correct?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is not 14 months.

1725 So, as the hon. Member is aware, because of his profession, it takes a while for these contracts to be negotiated. So we are currently in the throes of negotiating a contract with the party who the tender has been awarded to, which we estimate will take between one and a half and two months, and then, yes, then it will take a period of two years roughly to have a development plan.

1730 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So she is absolutely right in correcting me on the mathematics, which was terrible actually.

1735 But can I ask this? What type of local involvement will there be in the collation of evidence and that type of thing? Is she able to answer questions at that point? What type of interventions will there be? Because that is one of the points that I made when I reacted to that, as you will know, as she read the press release, that there ought to be local involvement, clearly, to inform the company, which I understand is an outside company, which is the company that has won the tender.

What type of local involvement will there be, and stakeholder – I do not like the use of that word, but I cannot think of another one in the process.

1740 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, obviously part of the two-year period is to involve local stakeholders in the process. So of course all local entities will be involved and of course all relevant local entities will form part of the process.

1745 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And when the Hon. Lady refers to ‘relevant local entities’ is she able to list those? What is it that she is envisaging in that respect as far as that particular aspect of the process is concerned?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Part of the contract will list those entities, but unfortunately I do not have sight of the specifics of the contract at this point in time.

1750 There will be a list of people that we expect them to engage with.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q603-5/2024

Minister Chairing Gibraltar Health Authority – Work commencing; frequency of meetings

1755 **Clerk:** Question 603. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Minister intending to chair the Gibraltar Health Authority or the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority?

1760 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 604 and 605.

1765 **Clerk:** Question 604. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How often has the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority met in the last three financial years – 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24?

1770 **Clerk:** Question 605. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How often has the Gibraltar Health Authority met in the last three financial years 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24?

1775 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the Minister, myself, is intending to chair the Gibraltar Health Authority and *not* the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority. The Management Board sits as the GHA executive team, which the Director General chairs. Since the appointment in January 22nd of the previous Director General this meeting has occurred weekly.

The GHA board has met as follows: financial year 2021-22, due to COVID-19, no board meetings were held; financial year 2022-23, it met on five occasions; and financial year 2023-24 it has met on five occasions.

1785 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, thank you. And that clarifies it. So I have very few supplementaries. It is just the purpose of the questions was the interchange of nomenclature that we have had a previous exchange about in the House. But that is now clear what is meant by that.

1790 Can I just ask specifically about the GHA itself, which I think the Hon. lady calls ‘the board’, but the GHA, if I may, just keep to the statutory description of it, which did not meet at all in 2021-22, she says. Can I ask why that was?

I know she said, because of COVID, but did that include ... were there no electronic Zoom meetings or anything like that of the GHA in that financial year, which really is not the financial year where the worst bits of COVID happened? The Unlock the Rock document was issued in May 2020. So by 2021-22 the worst effects were over; a vaccination programme had started.

1795 So why were there not electronic meetings if that is not provided for there? Or perhaps the electronic meetings were happening, but she means physical. So I just ask.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that predates my time, so I would only be able to surmise why there were no meetings during that period.

1800 I am perfectly happy to ask my predecessor as to the reasons why there were no board meetings, and get back to - (*Interjection*)

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): I can recall, Madam Speaker, that although we unlocked the Rock, the GHA continued to, in effect, be in a very difficult situation for a considerable period of time.

1810 Unlock the Rock was a document that dealt with the end of the social lockdown, which unfortunately subsequently came back. We had to lockdown again. So you Unlock the Rock to an extent now seems like us thinking that we had got through COVID, when in fact it was only the beginning. It was not even the beginning of the end.

1815 So the GHA in effect continued to be working towards a COVID situation for at least another year and a half. And at that time the GHA was not thinking about board meetings, it was thinking about continuing to do what it needed to do to save lives, not just in the context of COVID, but to continue to be able to save lives of those who had cancer treatment that had been delayed; those that needed to have their screening, etc.

1820 And I recall very vividly indeed the difficulties that the GHA was having at the time, which were not at all even starting to be resolved in May or June of 2020. Just to put this in context, the first reports of COVID in January-February 2020 happened. Then we had March when we saw the first cases of COVID in Gibraltar and the beginning of the lockdown. And April-May, when we started to see the worst of the lockdown. Then in May, we started to think that we could release the lockdown.

1825 But the GHA continued to be unable to establish normal operations for at least a year and a half after that. I was not the Minister for Health at the time, but I worked very closely with her. She worked every hour that God sent. She was also Minister for Justice and had responsibility for the legislation that we were passing at the time.

1830 And I recall that all of that reality is the ones that we had to remind ourselves to understand why they were not having board meetings. Indeed, I recall one of the things that we did was that we stopped the operation of the law that required any corporation to have a board meeting. So we actually gave a bye to companies and to associations that had to have by their bylaws, annual meetings. We actually gave them a bye to say they did not have to have the board meetings. So that was what we were doing in the economy generally, let alone in the GHA.

1835 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But if I may, Madam Speaker, that is precisely why I thought and I wanted to query this particular aspect, because certainly my experience of the GHA, this is a policy-making board. So a policy-making entity, which certainly in my time I used to Chair and would be dealing with the important issues of the day precisely for the explanation given by the Chief Minister.

1840 I would have thought that meetings were being held, albeit on an electronic basis. And certainly in the financial year we are talking about, because a lot of what the Chief Minister has just explained occurred in the previous financial year, if I may, and not in 2021-22, which is a bit further on. Well beyond some of that, after the vaccination programme had started and after, thankfully, the worst part of COVID.

1845 So if the Hon. Minister, can I ask the Hon. Minister to yes, ask her predecessor or her officials in relation to that, because it may simply be that they were discussing these things electronically, and that would be sufficient just in terms of information on this side of the House.

1850 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman will excuse me from speaking from memory, and *Hansard* will forgive me if I therefore confuse the numbers. But there seems in my mind there was no such thing as that financial year because we went from financial year 2019-20 not to financial year 21-22 or 2021. We went to a double financial year, a 24-month financial year, 2019-21, and then 2021-22 was the first financial year after the 24-month year, which is a misnomer, which we understand because we explained in detail in this House. And the GHA was still dealing with the civil contingency that was COVID, even at that time.

1855 And in the first financial year after COVID 2021-22, we still had the COVID line in the book because we were still incurring the COVID expenditure. And I think the GHA was still with the civil contingency declared and with a gold command structure. That is from memory.

1860 So, Madam Speaker, I think that is obviously what happened. And it is a matter of public record that that happened. I think it is a little ungenerous to ask the Minister to go back to look at the public record of what was happening at the time – and it may even be outside the rules of the House and the context of what it is that we can be asked about – because if it is public, then the hon. Gentleman can go to the archive and read the Chronicle for the year and see why it was that we were not doing those things.

1865 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** To clarify, I am not asking about anything that is in the public domain. What I was just asking the Minister to do is what I *think* she had offered towards the tail end of her answer, which I repeat, as a question.

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, what I think I have clarified is that we think it is all public, and therefore I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

1870 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q606/2024

**Minister Chairing Gibraltar Health Authority –
Work commencing; frequency of meetings**

Clerk: Question 606. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1875 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, will the Gibraltar Health Authority adopt the saliva/spit test that predicts genetic risk to prostate cancer, once commercially available, and roll this out in Gibraltar as part of a screening programme.

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

1880 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the saliva test referred to in the question is currently still undergoing clinical trials. The initial results indicate that this is a promising development that provides a more accurate test than the PSA blood test. The GHA *will* continue to monitor the outcomes of this research and consider this in future for using it in Gibraltar.

1885 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

1890 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am conscious that some of us do not have the luxury of being able to pop in and out of the Chamber, and I wonder whether, therefore, it might be a convenient moment to recess for 15 minutes and come back at five past six?

Madam Speaker: All right. We will recess for 15 minutes and return at 6.05.

The House recessed at 5.50 p.m. and resumed at 6.05 p.m.

Addressing Hon. Members

1895 **Madam Speaker:** Before we begin, I have been loath to interrupt individual Members as they have been speaking, but may I remind all Members on both sides that you/he/she ought to be avoided. We ought to address each other by 'the Hon. Member'. I have been benevolent before the break, but I have had a coffee, so I might not be so benevolent going forward.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE SAVINGS BANK

Q551-554/2024

General sinking fund –

Balances; cash reserves @ 1st May 2024

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Question 551. The Hon. R M Clinton.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government please provide the total gross debt, aggregate debt after application of the sinking fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for public debt for the following date, being 1st May 2024.

1905

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 552 to 554.

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Clerk: Question 552 the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following dates, being 1st May 2024.

1915

Clerk: Question 553. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government please advise why the General Sinking Fund decreased by £10 million from £28.3 million as at 1st March 2024, to £18.3 million as at 1st April 2024.

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Clerk: Question 554. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government explain how it is that reported cash reserves since 2021 temporarily increased significantly at March financial year end, only to fall back again in April?

1925

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the figures for 1st May 2024 are:

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- Gross public debt £872.7 million
- Aggregate debt £854.3 million
- Cash reserves £137.5 million
- Net debt £716.8 million

The balance on the Sinking Fund at the requested date is the same as on the previous date already provided.

The decrease of £10 million was as a result of the payment of interest on Government debt.

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The figure provided at the end of March each year is the Forecast Outturn calculated by the Treasury, which is usually quite close to the actual figure, which is the accurate figure.

The figures provided during the year are estimates which change from day to day. These cannot be relied as indicators and have never been published previously, given that this monthly information has been provided to the hon. Member Opposite since he started asking for it in the estimates in 2018.

1940

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answers.

1945 Can I ask the Minister in relation to his answer to Question 553? He said that the £10 million the decrease in the General Sinking Fund was because £10 million was used for the payment of interest on Government debt. May I ask the Minister why that was not put through the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, because the General Sinking Fund, which we created now and in the previous time we were in Government and which they did away with, provides that the money that is put into the Sinking Fund – which is usually money from the sale of assets or
1950 Contributions from the Consolidated Fund – once they are in there, they can be used for either the repayment of debt or the payment of interest.

And therefore, in looking at the financial situation this year, a decision was taken to use a part of that money for the payment of interest.

1955 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer to that.

If I can move on to question 554. I hear what the Minister said that during the years and the monthly numbers that I am given in this House may be estimates, but does the Minister have any sense of ... because I get estimates even for those months, sometimes. And to jump up significantly if, if I can give an example in March 2021 from £59 million to £119 million, in April 2021 from
1960 March 2022 from £37 million to £119 million in April 2022.

Is the Minister not slightly concerned that ... and it only happens at year end because then it goes down again. For example, in May 2022, it drops from £119 to £22 million. In April 2021, it was £119 million. And then in May it was £35 million. It always seems to peak at financial year ends.

1965 I am just wondering if the Minister has asked or inquired of the Financial Secretary whether there is anything that is done at financial year ends, some kind of journal entry or some other exercise that is done, which is not reflected during the year, or is done specifically at year end, and that changes the cash reserves so significantly.

1970 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I am not concerned because these figures are not produced for my benefit, they are produced for his benefit. And they have never been produced before he wanted to see them.

But I think I need to remind the Member that if he actually looks at the report that is produced when we have the audited accounts, the Principal Auditor's, there is a page that shows the
1975 movement of cash in a year and that at the moment is around in excess of £6 billion. So the Government's cash movement in and out is £6 billion. And there can be days with big movements and days with low movements.

So if the Hon. Member were to ask for the figures on any other day of the month, he would probably get big movements in and out. It is possible that when the close of the year is starting in
1980 March, that more pressure may be put for payments to Government that are due, in order to close the financial year and that that pressure is not there after 1st April. But, you know, this is just guesswork on my part.

I do not attach any particular significance because at the end of the day, we work on a cash basis on a 12-year cycle. And really, the only accurate figure we have is a figure that is subjected
1985 to audit and that happens on the last day of the year. Everything else in between are estimates.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I understand what the Minister is saying, but it just seems peculiar that it is always at the financial year end.

1990 He is speculating as he says, well, it may be that we asked debts to be paid. I can speculate as well and say, well, maybe we are not paying creditors. But in the financial world – and I hesitate to use this word, that is called window dressing, where you are improving the cash figure at your financial year end.

1995 I would just ask the Minister, if he can, to ensure that this is not a practice that we have fallen into, in effectively ensuring that the cash figure at the end of the financial year is somehow flattered.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Employ a financial secretary to flatter anything for him or for anybody else. And I can tell him, certainly, and I do not assume that he thinks that I have anything to do with deciding what the figures should be.

2000 If the Hon. Member is shrugging his shoulders, then I have to tell him I *resent* that he should doubt whether I have something to do with it. Okay. So I want to make it clear that the figures that are provided, are provided by the people who work for the Government of Gibraltar, not for the gilded politicians that happen to be in Government at any time, and that they are professionals. And that therefore, it is simple arithmetic. If you have got two dates and the figure
2005 at the beginning of the month is higher than at the lower of the month, then simple arithmetic tells you without having to ask an explanation from me, that in that month, when the figure is down, more money has gone down than has come in.

So the Hon. Member apparently is not concerned about the fact that it goes down. He is concerned about the fact that it did not go down earlier, because that is what his flattery of the end of the year implies. So he is asking me why it went down in May when really what he wants to ask me is: why was it higher in April?

Well, look, it was higher in April because probably every April the civil servants look at the money that the Government is owed and press people to pay the Government the money that they pay. It is only an assumption on my part, but they are an assumption that I would expect
2015 diligent civil servants to engage in doing. And if he thinks that is window dressing, well, unfortunately, I am not able to demonstrate if it was being done if the GSD was there, because nobody when the GSD was there from that side of the House asked for these figures.

So the figures only exist when he started asking for them and if they were concerned to window dress it, then we would have window dressed it so that they would not be able to ask me the
2020 question.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q555/2024

Rooke site residential home – Expectation to complete

Clerk: Question 555. The Hon. D J Bossino.

2025 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I hope the Minister is not in a bad mood now after this.

Can I ask him now after this question, Question 555 says: when is the residential home Rooke site project currently expected to complete?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

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Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Their position continues to be as previously stated in February this year.

Hon. D J Bossino: And just to clarify the answer, then, was that the project is likely to be completed by the end of this calendar year. So it is 2024. And is he still confident that that is going to be the case, that they will not be the subject of further delays? This is a project which is already
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delayed as it is and he has explained why that is the case and in the previous session to which he has referred, are by a year.

2040 So how confident is he that that nothing will be an obstacle to achieve the date that he has referred to, or the period of time that he has referred to?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, Mr Speaker, I am not in charge of running the project, so I am not confident or unconfident. I have just relayed the information to him that was relayed to me.

2045 I assume that the people who are involved in doing the home were confident that when they told me that it would be finished this year. So I am not in a position to be confident or not confident.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, the Member was very confident when he first announced the project.

2050 I remember him being interviewed, I think, on site at the time and he was extolling the virtues of this new modern construction method, which is the modular construction method that he was importing from China, and that it would be ready in June 2023.

He was the one, personally, on behalf of the Government, that was confident that this is something for the future. So I am surprised by the hon. Member's answer. But be that as it may, may I ask him who is responsible and who is providing him?

2055 So who is responsible for the timings of the project and the same entity, the same individuals must be the same entity individuals who are providing him with information as to completion times. Who are they? Who? I suppose the owners that he has referred to in asked to in the House in the past.

2060 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, there is a long list in the history of Gibraltar under every Government of things that have not been delivered on the date that they were expected to deliver. But in this case, this is not a Government-owned building that is being built. In the other cases, when the GSD was there, they were making projections and were confident about the buildings that were being paid by the taxpayer. And then things did not happen.

2065 There were buildings which for homes which they were very confident was going to be delivered by a particular contractor.

2070 And then the contractor disappeared over the hills, leaving a lot of debts to a lot of subcontractors in Gibraltar. And the Government had to come in and ask JBS to finish the job. That does not mean that the person who was at that point in time, a Member of the Government was responsible, because it was not running the building sites. It was simply giving Parliament answers based on information that he received.

2075 And therefore, I conveyed the confidence that there was at the beginning of the project, because at the beginning of the project, nobody anticipated problems that arose at a later stage in the project, which happens with every project that develops problems subsequent to the beginning.

The modular part was delivered on time and on cost. The only problems have been the parts that were not modular that have relied on local suppliers. That is all I can tell you.

2080 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Member has not answered the question, which is as to ownership, who currently owns this building and which is the entity that is providing him with that information? He gives us a history lesson of things which he says we did wrong, but they are different. They say they are much better than us. And he was very confident that this was going to be a huge success. And that is what he sold to the people of Gibraltar. And at this point –

2085 **Madam Speaker:** I am hesitant to interrupt the Hon. Member and please correct me if I am wrong, but my recollection was that the question on ownership of the Rooke was disallowed on the basis that it had been asked at a previous meeting within the six-month period. (*Interjection*)

I cannot, either, but I am almost certain.

Hon. D J Bossino: But I genuinely cannot recall –

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Madam Speaker: But if I am wrong then you can clearly ask that question at the next session, but I am almost certain it was it was one of the questions that was disallowed.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, it may have been, you are right that there may have been, I think on the back of the answer as filed by the Hon. Member, I think I filed and then that may have been disallowed. So I will not pursue that point.

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So I have dealt with the history and it is what it is. And I cannot pursue the issue as to who owns this site, but the Hon. Member at the time said that in February, which he referred to, he said the completion dates will be sometime this year. And then he said that the Government will take a decision on how it will access or use the facilities.

Is that option still available to the Government? And within that, is he also intending for the site to be used as a residential home and for the site to be occupied by those who currently reside at Mount Alvernia?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, I share the view of the GSD Government that we will announce things when we decide it is necessary to announce them, and not when the Opposition wants us to announce it.

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So therefore, that is what I learned in opposition from the previous Government and I took the lesson to heart, and I think that is a good policy to follow. So the answer is we will announce what we will do when we decide what we are doing.

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Hon. D J Bossino: But the question was very specific, that he may decide to announce it whenever he wishes to do so, but he already responded in February that the Government would take a decision on how it will access and use the facilities. Is that still within the realms of possibilities as far as the decision-making process is concerned? Is it something that he is considering using as a facility once it is completed?

He may announce it whenever he wishes to, but he has already said that there will be a question of access and use of the facilities, whatever that means.

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, this has not changed from what I told him the last time.

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Hon. D J Bossino: He was much more helpful in February when he was providing answers as to the delays, but that is the way that the hon. Member operates and answers questions. And he gave a list of things which had happened which were the cause of delays.

And he mentioned, as he may recall, that the source of the delays in respect of this project were in relation to the non-modular parts. In other words, the modular aspect of it was fine being brought from China, fitted out, and it was the non-modular aspects which had been the cause of the delay.

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Can I ask him very specifically whether there is one of the issues which is causing a delay to the completion of this project is the fact well, I say the fact, it is the information that we have that there has not been a fire safety certification in relation to this.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: No knowledge of what he is talking about, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. Member to enquire whether that is the reason for the delay? Because quite frankly, we on this side of the House is the information that we have, and we think that it is an issue of very serious concern.

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May I also ask him this? Is it also the case that the door size of the modules, the containers which have formed parts of this project are not big enough to allow for wheelchair access, and that that is another reason why this project is being delayed.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: We will ask to see whether what the Hon. Member is saying has any truth for it, and I have nothing more to add, however many more supplementaries he wants to put.

2145 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, this is almost akin to if he does not like the answer, he can lump it, to which I was treated in the last Parliament. And again, typical, with the greatest of respect to him, of the hon. Member opposite.

But can I ask him this? Does he still think that this project was worthwhile and a wise investment and a success? Or is he now starting to at least consider whether it is a complete and utter failure and a waste of money?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, if the Hon. Member wants to know why I react the way that I react is because when, in good faith, I assume that he wants information in order to be better informed about what is happening. I give him more information and I seek the information for him until he shows his true colours and shows that he is not remotely interested in anything other than in an ability to attack me, presumably because he thinks it gets him more votes.

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And since I am not interested in getting him more votes in order to replace the Hon. Mr Azopardi, I am not going to do anything that is going to be in his favour, and I am not going to give him any more opportunities to put on a show here which he thinks helps him to get where he wants to be.

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Madam Speaker: Is there another supplementary as opposed to a comment?

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, there absolutely is and I am aware of the rules, and there is a supplementary. It is interesting to see that the Hon. the Minister is now Mr Azopardi's biggest fan, it seems, and wishing to protect his position based on a fallacy, let me tell him, based on a false premise. And I do not need to seek –

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Madam Speaker: The question is?

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Hon. D J Bossino: I need to just make this point, if I may, I do not –

Madam Speaker: You may not. Put the question, (*Interjections*) we are on seven supplementaries –

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Hon. D J Bossino: I do not need to seek extra votes.

Madam Speaker: Put the question or I will ask the hon. Member to sit down.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I have thrown the pen. Can I ask –?

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Madam Speaker: That was accidental, I am going to presume. (*Interjection*)

Hon. D J Bossino: It is a pity because that was a good point.

Can the hon. Member state whether there has been any advance in relation to the contractual arrangements – which he has said in this House in the past – he intends to get involved in as far as the operation. One thing is the ownership, this is the operation and the management of the residential home is concerned – assuming it is still going to be a residential home because the hon. Member has unanswered questions in relation to that. This is operation –

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Madam Speaker: And my recollection was that the question that was disallowed was on management ownership. Well, I might be wrong, but I do not think so. It was quite a lengthy question, and to my recollection it touched on ownership, management and something else.

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If the hon. Member disagrees with me, I am very happy for you to persuade me otherwise.
(*Interjection*) So would I, but I am almost certain it was disallowed.

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Madam Speaker: All right, we are going to move on.
Next question.

Q556-60/2024

Road to the Lines –

Upgrade; company; purpose; costs; timeline; responsibility

Clerk: Question 556. The Hon. D J Bossino.

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Madam Speaker: If I am wrong, I will allow the Hon. Member to put that question next time.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, I am very grateful, Madam Speaker.

So, what plans does the Government have to upgrade the infrastructure to Road to the Lines?
(*Interjection*)

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I will answer this question with Questions 557 to 560.

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Clerk: Question 557/2024, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I have a spare pen!

Which company is carrying out works at Road to the Lines?

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Clerk: Question 558. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What is the purpose behind the works being currently carried out at Road to the Lines?

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Clerk: Question 559. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What are the envisaged costs and what is the timeline to upgrade the infrastructure at Road to the Lines?

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Clerk: Question 560. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Who is going to be responsible for the costs of the upgrade of the infrastructure at Road to the Lines?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, there are no works being carried out on Road to the Lines. The area is being cleared to assess its potential and no decision has been taken at this stage on the infrastructure.

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Hon. D J Bossino: 556 ... I think we need to make a reference to the questions.

2240 When I talked about the plans, why is it the case that we have gone from a project which seemed to be much more sophisticated than the one that we understand is currently happening – which is a clearing of the site, when it was under the auspices of the Deputy Chief Minister, in respect of which I asked him questions at the last House.

2245 He had there an expression of interest, and an individual had been identified to carry out the projects at Road to the Lines, then to the projects going to the Hon. the Minister for Housing. When I asked the question at the last session to now, the matter being handled by the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development.

What is it that they are now planning to do? Because it is all very confusing. It has gone from private investor to rent and repair, to now the Hon. Mr Bossano doing something in respect of which he has provided very little by way of answer.

2250 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not think I can help the hon. Member if he is easily confused. That is the problem, maybe, that some other speciality might help him with, but not me.

2255 The fact that the project that the Deputy Chief Minister referred to before has not proceeded, is because there have been more than one occasion when it has gone out to expression of interest and people have come up and offered money for the site, and then when they have actually started doing numbers they have not continued. They have backed out, because it is a difficult site to work, according to the people that have been there before. And therefore, when people are expecting to make a lot of money and they start finding complexity and a difficulty of access and difficulty of the infrastructure and so on, they just do not do it.

2260 So there is not a sinister move, although it is quite obvious that in his mind he sees sinister moves in anything. But it has got quite a simple explanation. It came back to the Government, and not for the first time, it has happened more than once. And therefore, until we are sure that we can do something that is consistent with what we want to do in terms of getting the best use for that site, the answers that he can get are very little because we have not yet reached a decision stage.

2265 So, at the moment, we have got somebody that is clearing the site. There are possible things that we can do on that site in housing for local people and we cannot say more than that until we are sure that we are going to be doing it, because of course if we say anything more than that and we find that it does not happen afterwards, then the Hon. Member will want to punish us for having told him something that was not written in the Bible and was bound to happen.

2270 And I do not want to put him in that situation in the future.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful to the Hon. Member for not putting me in that position.

2275 But he does not need to take these things personally. I am not attacking him. I am not trying to find sinister motives. I am simply asking questions because the hon. Member does not provide very full answers. He does not provide very full answers and I have given him a brief abridged history of what is going on on this particular site!

2280 And from our point of view, he must understand that we are seeing a Government which is in disarray and unable to come to a decision as far as this site is concerned. It is an absolute and utter mess, as far as we can see on this side of the House, which is not being assuaged by the answers that the Hon. the Minister is providing.

2285 But the hon. Member, the Hon. the Minister, has not answered a few questions, which I think he is in a position to answer. He says that 'somebody' is carrying out ... I called it the works. He said no works. They are just clearing out. I consider that 'the works' is a generic term which can include a clearing out. Who is this somebody? Which company is carrying out these works?

I it is a company, and I imagine it is a company, has that not gone out to tender?

2290 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I know that saying we are all in disarray is not attacking us. I accept that, you know! (*Laughter*) But now that we have to know what the terminology is, so as to know when he is being nice to us, so that we can recognise it when we see it.

I cannot give him the name of the person, I do not have it, of the worker. But it is a small company employing local people. And what they are doing at the moment is clearing the site, that is to say, and doing investigations to see if something that might happen – which I am not going to tell him what it is, because it might not happen, and I do not want him to go through these emotional struggles that he has of being totally confident that he can take every word that I am telling him, as written in tablets of stone, and then he finds that I can't deliver.

2295 I do not want to keep on disappointing the hon. Member at this point in his career. So I will find out who it is and I will communicate the name, and when they are in a position to provide the information as to whether we can proceed in the line, that I would hope we would be able to proceed, and I can do it with the confidence that it is going to happen and will not be delayed, and I will not have to see him disappointed by the delays, then I will communicate a more in-depth picture.

2300 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am entitled to attack *them*!

2305 What I told the hon. Member is that I was not attacking *him* personally, which is what he accused me of in one of his responses. We are entitled, this is what we are here to do, to ask questions and also attack them, if we think that what they are doing is wrong. This is the nature of the politics that we have in this place, and indeed I think in the entirety of most democracy, if not all the democracies.

2310 But he has not. There are many questions which remain unanswered, which I think the hon. Member can answer. Why is it, he says he is going to provide me with the information in relation to which entity is carrying out the 'clearing up', as he puts it. Why is it that he has ...

2315 Well, can he state whether the contract has been given to this entity as a result of a tender process? Yes or no? I am not attacking him personally. He can relax and I am very relaxed about it –

Madam Speaker: Before the question is answered, I would just say that I did not want to interrupt the hon. Member, but in my view the purpose of the Opposition should be to hold the Government to account and not to attack.

2320 But that is a separate conversation we can have some other time and it might dissipate any answers on this side which need not be taken on that issue. So let's answer ...

2325 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful that you have made that point, because before we can continue with Question Time, I think it is incumbent on me as Leader of the House to try and clarify, in particular for those who may be listening and who are watching our politics, to say that we on this side of the House do not believe that we are here to attack each other.

2330 We believe, Madam Speaker, that a Government has been elected to govern, that is to do. And an opposition has been elected to hold us to account in that respect. We do not believe that we have a system of Government and Opposition where we should expect to be attacked, as the hon. Gentleman has set out. And I think it is very important that we set this out at this stage, and I shall have a lot more, unfortunately, now, in particular, given what the hon. Gentleman has said, to say about this during the course of this session.

2335 But we have an adversarial system of Government and Opposition. That does *not* mean and has never meant that we have a system of Government and Opposition where the Opposition attacks the Government. We have a system where the Opposition attacks the ideas that the Government may put in analysing them and in working out whether they are the best ideas for our people.

But the idea that the hon. Gentleman has given flight to, I think is *very* negative, but *hugely* descriptive of how he and others on his side do politics. And therefore. Madam Speaker, although

2340 I want everybody watching and listening to know that it will not be our style to attack Hon. Members Opposite, but to challenge their ideas also, and to accept that they should hold us to account.

I thank him for having slipped off the mask for long enough that he has explained to the public what their approach to politics is, in glorious technicolour.

2345

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure on what basis the hon. Member just rose. Because he said before we continue with Question Time. So I am rising on the same basis, almost as if this was a *quasi* point of order to make an intervention, an opportunity to make a speech. May I say, Madam Speaker, on a reversal and turning the reality on its head of what normally happens, because what normally happens – and it beggars belief to hear what the Hon. Member has just said.

2350
2355 Some of those words should have got stuck in his throat because the description that he has given about political parties going on the attack with negativity is what he does all the time in this House, (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) to every single Member on this side of the House. And we will see it, no doubt in glorious technicolour, as we do every year, especially when he does his budget reply. (*Interjection*)

2360 And it is an easy forecast because we get it every year that when he gets to the budget reply, he will single out every single Member on this side of the House in the most vicious and personalised way. And then he stands up and puts up his best altar-boy look and pretends to the people of Gibraltar that actually it is the heinous GSD that are the negative people in this House.

2365 Let me say that I have no problem with the adversarial system of Government and Opposition, because they were as adversarial as we are being on this side of the House, when they were on this side of the House. They were as adversarial as we are being.

2370 And that is normal. But let's not pretend that they are somehow in a special place when it comes to how we conduct politics. Because –

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Member have a question? (*Interjections*) Just a minute, just a minute. I am speaking to the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2370

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I do not have a question in the same way as he did was not purporting to answer questions. He prefaced, if I may, his intervention with: 'Before we carry on with Question Time.'

2375 **Madam Speaker:** I have heard both of you. Now we are moving on to the next question. Moving on to the next question.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, if I may. They had another substantive ...

2380 The hon. Member is the Leader of the House and not the Speaker of the House. I am addressing the Speaker now.

Madam Speaker: I would ask all hon. Members to sit down. When I speak, no one speaks. We are moving on to the next question.

2385 I will allow you to ask one more supplementary. But I will remind hon. Members that when the Speaker is speaking, Members should not speak. And if they are standing, they should take a seat.

One supplementary without a preamble. (*Interjection*) That is my proviso. No preamble.

Hon. D J Bossino: Understood, Madam Speaker.

2390 The supplementary is this and indeed it is not really a supplementary. It is a substantive question in the Order Paper which the hon. Member has not answered. And it is this: it is 559 and

560, which *both* deal with the issue of costs: costs and timeline, indeed, and costs of the upgrade as to the infrastructure.

Can the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development, who now has responsibility for this project, answer those questions to which he has not responded?

2395

Madam Speaker: All right. The question is there. The Hon. Minister has the floor.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2400

First of all, I do not know whether the hon. Member has a short memory, but he has been here long enough to know that giving an answer to a question does not mean that you get the answer that you want.

2405

I have been on that side of the House 32 years asking questions, and I have never treated a Government the way they perform. In fact, I used to be attacked for asking a question, never mind answering it. So the position is quite simple. If I tell the Hon. Member no decision has been taken at this stage on the infrastructure, how can I tell him what the cost of no decision is?

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q490/2024

Gibraltar Travel Guide – Financial contribution

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism. Question 490. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2410

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Government making a financial contribution to the Gibraltar Travel Guide being produced by Outlook Travel; and if so, what is the extent of the same?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2415

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, there is no Government financial contribution to the Gibraltar Travel Guide produced by Outlook Travel.

2420

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So is this just an opportunity that arose in discussions with that particular entity? Or perhaps the Minister can inform us a bit how that came about.

I am assuming that entities and companies that want to participate in the travel document will then be asked for advertising fees, and so on and so forth. But perhaps the Minister can illuminate us?

2425

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the Outlook business model is that they provide a service free of charge for the Government, and then they look to source interest from commercial enterprises that may be interested to advertise with them. So we are just offered the opportunity to do a travel guide under Gibraltar. And then it is their responsibility whether they find advertising for this or not.

2430

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And this is an opportunity that the Government would offer any other entity. What is special about Outlook Travel? Or how did this come about? Because I saw from

2435 their own website that they have got this kind of document in relation to specific places around the world, but nothing obviously linking some of these places.

So presumably there are entities out there that run the same kind of business. Am I right to assume that the Government would be happy for any other entity to also do this?

2440 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, part of the remit, or the remit of the Tourist Board is to market Gibraltar as a destination. So any opportunity from any reputable publishing or magazine that gives us the opportunity to promote the destination, we will take.

2445 This is not the first year that this has been done. I have inherited this from the past, and we are given the opportunity to have a travel guide and we take it, and then we get lots of different opportunities from different magazines. Some we pay for advertorials and some are offered to us for free.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q491/2024

**Gibraltar Airport April 2024 –
Early closures; staffing issues; discussions with MOD**

Clerk: Question 491. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2450 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, has the Government had discussions with the MOD in relation to the early closures of the Gibraltar Airport during April 2024 following reported staffing issues?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2455 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Yes, Madam Speaker.

2460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And can the Minister perhaps report to this House what the nature and content of those conversations have been? This is not the first time that in this House we have had questions and discussions about events afflicting the Airport.

This is a further round, so it would be helpful to understand from the Government what the content of those conversations have been.

2465 **Hon. C P Santos:** The MOD kept the Government fully informed of the possibility of a closure, and updated their information as necessary over the period that they were managing their staffing issues.

The exchange of information allowed us to liaise with the handling agents so they could make the relevant changes to their flights. So there were no cancellations on this occasion.

2470 The Airport was affected for five days. They closed early evening, but it only affected flights on three of those days. None of the scheduled flights were cancelled. This was due to some health issues, some prolonged and some short term. From what we discussed after, this was not something that was going to continue happening but happened on this occasion.

2475 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. So from the end of that answer, can I assume the Government received assurances that this was a short-term situation and that this is not indicative of any long-term staffing problem?

2480 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I am aware that they had staffing issues in the past. I had discussions about this with them. Some of the health issues are long term and, I am not going to get into the details because it is not for me to discuss other people's health matters. But on this occasion, it was one of those moments where there was a lot of staff illness at the same time, causing shortages of staff at that time.

2485 They assure me that this is not facing the same problems that they did, I think it may have been last year when we had some issues of staffing. So I am confident that this will be something that we will not encounter in the near future.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q607/2024
Gibraltar's parental leave legislation –
Stakeholders; existing policies

Clerk: Question 607. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2490 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Government provide a breakdown of the various stakeholders it is engaging with, and any existing policies it may be referencing in the enhancement of Gibraltar's parental leave legislation?

2495 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Government has met with the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses, as well as Unite the Union. Representatives from the Ministry of Equality and the Department of Social Security are present at these meetings.
2500 Further discussions are scheduled to take place imminently.

Hon. A Sanchez: I am grateful for that answer.
It would be helpful for the Hon. Minister if he could perhaps provide further clarification on the exact stage of the development of this crucial policy area.

2505 I asked because on the one hand we have a Government press release dated September 2019 claiming that the work undertaken on this was already at an advanced stage. But on the other hand, we seem to have an invitation for a Town Hall event from one of the stakeholders that the Hon. Minister has mentioned, to gather feedback to then provide to the Equality Minister.

2510 And specifically on the invitation it has been described as a potential Government policy, which is in the early stages of development.

Now, of course, whilst we welcome public involvement and consultation as it enriches policy development there seems to be a disparity between advanced stages, and now early stages in 2024. So perhaps the Hon. Minister can clarify this?

2515 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, there is not a disparity with what we say with regard to advanced and what the GFSB, which are the ones I announced for the Town Hall for 4th July, and if anyone has any suggestions that they want to pass on to them, please go and attend the Town Hall.

2520 Whatever they choose to post is up to them. That does not necessarily reflect where we are at. I think that because, as the Hon. Member opposite has mentioned, it is a crucial and very important policy decision that we need to make with regard to parental leave.

Where we are at, is that now I have relooked at everything that was at the advanced stages in 2019, this is not just about how it will affect financially, we are also at a point in the deal that we need to see how that is going to work with cross-border workers.

2525 We are also at a point where I would want to get further details on how the private sector feels about what our policies may be. I have not made anything clear to them. I just want to get their feedback before we, as a Government, decide on what is the best way moving forward for not just with parental leave, but everything to do with leave surrounding childbirth.

2530 I will not get into the details of this, but I want to have the most thorough piece of information that I can in order to make the most adequate and appropriate decisions on something like parental leave.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q608/2024
Blue Badge applications –
Received; approved; disallowed; denied

Clerk: Question 608. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2535

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government provide the number of applications received for Blue Badge permits, along with the number of applications approved – permits issued – and the number of applications disallowed or denied for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to current date?

2540

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Blue Badge statistics are as follows:

2545

- 2021: 99 Blue Badge Applications
91 Approved
8 Not Approved
- 2022: 103 Blue Badge Applications
90 Approved
13 Not Approved
- 2023: 155 Blue Badge Applications
142 Approved
13 Not Approved
- 2024: 87 Blue Badge Applications
69 Approved
13 Not Approved
5 pending panel

2550

2555

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q609/2024
Frontier Passes –
Received; approved; disallowed; denied

2560 **Clerk:** Question 609/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state how many applications for Frontier Passes have been received, accepted – passes issued – and disallowed or denied, delineated by the following years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to current date.

2565

Clerk: The Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the statistics for the Frontier Passes are as follows:

YEAR	RECEIVED	APPROVED	REFUSED
2019	29	24	5
2020	18	16	2
2021	75	67	8
2022	83	71	12
2023	74	54	20
2024	72	49	19

2570 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, Would the Hon. Minister be able to clarify what is the eligibility criteria for the Frontier Passes?

2575 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, we just hand out the Frontier Passes after the approval of a medical panel. At the moment I am not quite sure what the eligibility criteria is. We just get the forms at the SNDO office, which we just took this over in April 2024. We pass it on to a medical professional to sign and stamp, and then it goes to a medical panel; and then we receive the information back, and we either give the Frontier Pass or not give the Frontier Pass.

2580 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Is there anywhere I can find this criteria, as it is not publicly available?

Hon. C P Santos: I am not quite sure, because this is a medical decision, so we try and keep out of the decision-making process.

So we go through the admin and we pass it through to the medical panel which makes these decisions. I am unsure whether this is or is not published.

2585

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2590 I hope that the Minister might be able to clarify for me, it in part refers as well to Question 608. Looking at the number of applications and so on, and numbers granted, am I correct in assuming that these passes either for Blue Badge or the Frontier Passes are not issued *ad infinitum*, but rather have an expiry date. And therefore, my adding up all the numbers there does not mean that there are x hundreds of passes valid at any given time.

2595 If there is an expiry date, then that could account for the numbers currently in validity not being not being as high as 300 or 400 or whatever my mathematical conclusion will come to. And

if that is the case, is the Minister aware of what are the lifespan of these passes issued? Because I am assuming that many of them are being issued on medical grounds.

The person requiring that might hope to get better, especially with mobility issues, and therefore at times spent there. Any information would be grateful.

2600

Hon. C P Santos: Currently we are reviewing the process with regard to people who would need it for an extended period of time. There are people who are not going to get better from their condition. Currently there is an expiry date. I am not 100% sure what the expiry time is. I can find this out for you and I will no doubt let you know.

2605

But there are some temporary passes that you can apply. If it is a temporary disability, for example, you may have come out of an operation, or you may be immobile for a certain period of time, and those are temporary. Those have expiry dates that are according to what your case is.

2610

The longer term ones need to be renewed. But as I said, we are looking for those who have chronic disabilities to not have to have these renewed after three or four years. I am not quite sure what the lifespan of the Blue Badge or the Frontier Passes are, but I will find out and let you know.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Bossino.

2615

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, when the Hon. the Minister, in respect of his last reply, he talks about 'the review in respect of those individuals who have a permanent disability'.

2620

Can I take from that, that in effect what he is saying is that the Government has made the decision in relation to that. It is a policy decision that those individuals who are suffering from a chronic, permanent condition will no longer need to go through the process of reapplying, because in some respects, it can be almost demeaning to be able to say, 'Well, actually, this person still has ...' Especially if you are doing it on behalf of somebody else. It is just an added stress they need to go through. Not big stress, but nevertheless it is an added administrative and bureaucratic hurdle.

2625

Let me just say that I think we would support the Government in relation to that. But the question is: is it a policy decision which the Government has arrived at? And it is a question of reviewing it from an *administrative* perspective.

2630

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I would not necessarily describe having a disability or having to apply for anything to do with a disability as demeaning. We all do as people. We renew our ID cards and that is not necessarily a demeaning process.

I understand what the Member opposite is trying to say, but I would not necessarily use that terminology. But that is my own use of language.

2635

Now, what we have done, to answer your question, yes, this is a policy decision. We are creating a database so that we can make sure that that it is linked to a general Government database so that people with a chronic disability do not need to apply just because it is seasonal, not necessarily, because I think they would find it demeaning just because it is from an administrative perspective.

2640

It will work better for us and it is not as time consuming. And if you have a permanent disability, there will still be a scan. We still need to check that you are in the system, but it will not be the way that it is working now.

2645

Hon. D J Bossino: For the Member, it seems that I am choosing my words wrongly for the Hon. Members opposite. I said it and I meant what I said, and 'demeaning emotional hurdle' call it what you will, but do I take it then that the answer to the question that I posed is yes, that the Government has come to a policy decision in relation to this, which we support, if that is the case, and that really what it is doing is looking at the administrative aspects of it, databases and all the rest of it, to then make that policy decision come to fruition.

Hon. C P Santos: Yes. This is what I was answering, as you were muttering on the other side. But yes, I said, this is a policy decision we make and to make the administrative process easier.

2650

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q610-11/2024

**Bruce's Farm community-based programme –
Individuals chosen to enter**

Clerk: Question 610. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Madam Speaker: I have not called order yet since I have been in the Chair, but I might have to today. Can we have silence so that the Hon. Mrs Sanchez can put her question?

2655

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide the figures for how many individuals have chosen to enter the community-based programme, which mirrors aspects of the programme at Bruce's Farm for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date.

2660

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 611.

2665

Clerk: Question 611. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide the figures for how many individuals have been admitted on to, or chosen to enter the residential in-house programme at Bruce's Farm for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date?

2670

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker.

2675

Answer to Question 610

Year	Clients
2021	158
2022	145
2023	182
2024 to present date	102

2680

2685

Answer to Question 611

Year	Clients Admitted to OARS Residential Programme at Bruce's Farm
2021	61
2022	44
2023	46
2024 to present date	24

Hon. A Sanchez: And in relation to question 610, the figures seem to be rather high.

2690 Can the Hon. Minister state whether the Government is assessing these figures and how they are presenting, and elaborate on how the Government intends to continue to develop this area of service?

2695 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, we are analysing the figures. Firstly, I would like to explain that the figures for the community-based programme may seem higher because the community based programme can be used as a secondary step after you have had the residential, as well as people who choose to not go into residential in-house programme at Bruce's Farm and just do the community-based programme.

2700 Whilst a figure that seems high may seem like a negative, we see it as a positive. We see it as people wanting to get better, wanting to get treatment. There is more awareness, more support in the system, so more people are taking up these opportunities.

2705 So we know that people take drugs. The good thing about this is that people are choosing to get out of that circle. And for us, the higher the figure, what it is saying is not more people are using drugs, it is more people want to leave drugs.

2710 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Grateful for that answer, but nonetheless it also signifies that there is a continuing problem with people that are actually using drugs. And my question is how the Government intends to continue to develop this area of service further? And the Hon. Minister has not addressed that question.

2715 **Hon. C P Santos:** If 158 seems like a high number of people using drugs in Gibraltar, we are really doing well. That is zero-point something percent of the community. So I think it is actually too low for people wanting to get out of drugs. But anyway, what we are doing is we are working, we have reconvened the Drugs Advisory Council.

2720 So we have got stakeholders from all different sectors of the community. We are working inter-ministerially between the Ministry of Justice as well as the Ministry of Health and Care to see how we can continue to support people who want to stop taking drugs; how we can minimise the use; and minimise the harm.

2725 We are working together to create new programmes as well. As you know, the rehabilitation services are working really well. We are trying to upskill people within the rehabilitation services so that we can get them into employment after they leave. We have got all different types of initiatives that we are looking at in the Drugs Advisory Council.

So this is what we are doing as a Government at the moment.

2725 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q612-13/2024

**Drugs and alcohol rehabilitation –
Weekly programmes; aftercare**

Clerk: Question 612. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government state how many programmes are offered on a weekly basis to clients needing aftercare support from drugs and alcohol rehabilitation services?

2730

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 613.

2735

Clerk: Question 613. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government provide the figures for the number of individuals attending the aftercare programme on a weekly basis for drugs and alcohol rehabilitation services for the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date?

2740

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the total number of programmes offered on a weekly basis to clients needing aftercare support is three. And no records were held for the year 2020; however, I now hand over a schedule with the rest of the information requested.

2745

Answer to Question 613

Year 2021

Week ending	25-Apr	02-May	09-May	16-May	23-May	30-May	06-Jun	14-Jun	20-Jun	
Number of Individuals	2	3	18	12	0	4	7	8	4	
Week ending	27-Jun	04-Jul	11-Jul	18-Jul	25-Jul	01-Aug	08-Aug	15-Aug	22-Aug	
Number of Individuals	12	11	2	14	8	14	13	16	7	
Week ending	29-Aug	05-Sep	12-Sep	19-Sep	26-Sep	03-Oct	10-Oct	17-Oct	24-Oct	
Number of Individuals	24	10	6	8	19	0	9	13	9	
Week ending	31-Oct	07-Nov	14-Nov	21-Nov	28-Nov	05-Dec	12-Dec	19-Dec	26-Dec	02-Jan
Number of Individuals	5	12	22	15	7	13	7	9	2	0

2750

2755

Year 2022

Week ending	09-Jan	16-Jan	23-Jan	30-Jan	06-Feb	13-Feb
Number of Individuals	1	1	5	0	7	12
Week ending	13-Mar	20-Mar	27-Mar	03-Apr	10-Apr	17-Apr
Number of Individuals	22	17	21	10	11	14
Week ending	15-May	22-May	29-May	05-Jun	12-Jun	19-Jun
Number of Individuals	16	18	19	18	18	20
Week ending	17-Jul	24-Jul	31-Jul	07-Aug	14-Aug	21-Aug
Number of Individuals	16	20	16	14	15	26
Week ending	18-Sep	25-Sep	02-Oct	09-Oct	16-Oct	23-Oct
Number of Individuals	18	23	23	20	26	24
Week ending	20-Nov	27-Nov	04-Dec	11-Dec	18-Dec	25-Dec
Number of Individuals	20	18	22	25	27	31

Continued Answer to Year 2022

20 Feb	27 Feb	06 Mar
12	12	15
24 Apr	01 May	08 May
20	17	28
26 Jun	03 Jul	10 Jul
24	18	16
28 Aug	04 Sep	11 Sep
22	26	14
30 Oct	06 Nov	13 Nov
22	22	23

2760

Continued Answer to Question 613

Week ending	01-Jan	08-Jan	15-Jan	22-Jan	29-Jan	05-Feb	12-Feb	19-Feb	26-Feb
Number of Individuals	36	29	36	29	32	35	29	34	38
Week ending	05-Mar	12-Mar	19-Mar	26-Mar	02-Apr	09-Apr	16-Apr	23-Apr	30-Apr
Number of Individuals	37	42	28	29	26	19	21	32	36
Week ending	07-May	14-May	21-May	28-May	04-Jun	11-Jun	18-Jun	25-Jun	02-Jul
Number of Individuals	38	30	36	41	36	34	42	32	38
Week ending	09-Jul	16-Jul	23-Jul	30-Jul	06-Aug	13-Aug	20-Aug	27-Aug	03-Sep
Number of Individuals	33	38	38	43	33	36	43	39	36
Week ending	10-Sep	17-Sep	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov
Number of Individuals	32	40	39	42	37	23	42	38	40
Week ending	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	24-Dec	31-Dec	
Number of Individuals	41	40	44	27	52	47	45	37	

2765

To present date

Week ending	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	03-Mar
Number of Individuals	33	47	42	35	39	43	32	34	45
Week ending	10-Mar	17-Mar	24-Mar	31-Mar	07-Apr	14-Apr	21-Apr	28-Apr	05-May
Number of Individuals	41	46	33	22	32	43	32	41	21
Week ending	12-May	19-May	26-May	02-Jun	09-Jun	16-Jun			
Number of Individuals	42	36	25	27	28	24			

2770 **Madam Speaker:** All right, we will move on to the next question. Or do you have a supplementary on 612? Yes.

Hon. A Sanchez: And, Madam Speaker, I appreciate that perhaps the Hon. Minister might not have this information, but perhaps he can shed some light on this.

2775 In terms of young people can the Hon. Minister share whether the Government is concerned about drug and alcohol misuse in young people and perhaps elaborate on the programs available for them specifically, and the help that they and their parents or guardians can receive on this matter.

2780 **Hon. C P Santos:** Well, Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that to know what the numbers of young people are. I can tell you that we have a very well-rounded programme, and I take it that with young people you mean people between 16 and 24? Is that the information I need to get?

2785 We are working within the Drugs Advisory Council and the youth services involved. I am very fortunate to also be Minister for Youth. So I have the opportunity to work within all nine Ministries to have one cohesive, seamless programme where we develop programmes not just for young people, but for everyone as a whole.

So I will look in to see what the statistics are with regard to age.

Madam Speaker: All right.

2790 Would the Hon. Member like me to give her some time to look at the Schedule? All right, so we will come back to Question 613 and we will move on now.

**Q614-15/2024
PATHS programme –
Current setup; support**

Clerk: Question 614. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2795 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide details on the current setup and operation of the PATHS programme?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2800 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 615.

Clerk: Question 615, the Hon. G Origo.

2805 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what sort of support will be offered and who will be offering such support to those enrolled on the PATHS initiative, which is designed to empower and upskill these individuals?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2810 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the Professional Advancement through Holistic Skills Programme – the PATHS programme – as I have previously mentioned in Parliament, is a Government initiative designed to enhance employability by addressing individuals' skill gaps through the provision of short-term courses and providing comprehensive, bespoke support to the individuals.

2815 Currently, we have rolled out these within our Supported Employment Scheme participants and we are under way with the below entities whereby we have had to establish clear pathways and procedures specific to the type of user.

Employment: we will be upskilling participants who are actively seeking employment or are currently enrolled in a training scheme.

2820 We have a collaboration with HMP Windmill Hill, partnering with this initiative to launch a work reintegration programme by upskilling those serving a prison sentence who are unemployed.

We are working with the Rehabilitation Services, providing upskilling opportunities through our Rehabilitation Services.

And the Youth Services, integrating the programme with 'The Zone', which is the scheme for Neet, those 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' for young individuals.

2825 Once a participant is identified, our Ministry arranges for one of the tailored packages to be applied based on the individual's skills and the identified gaps within our workforce. The courses are conducted at the Digital Skills Academy and upon successful completion participants receive certification from the course provider, officially endorsed by myself on behalf of the Ministry.

2830 The support provided to these individuals is facilitated not only by our Employment Services, but also by our Ministry. As part of the PATHS initiative we have developed comprehensive support packages designed with a holistic approach.

These packages are offered in collaboration with various service providers in Gibraltar, delivering one-on-one sessions, workshops and group sessions.

2835 These services focus on confidence building, communication skills, mental health support and job coaching to ensure a well-rounded and effective support system. By focusing on a holistic approach to skill development, the programme will see individuals achieve personal and professional growth, leading to better job opportunities, career advancements and overall economic development.

2840 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I am grateful for that answer, Madam Speaker. And could the Hon. Member Minister clarify how is the individual identified? Is it through a referral or does the individual have to apply themselves? Can he clarify this?

2845 **Hon. C P Santos:** PATHS is an employment programme, Madam Speaker, so it is usually referred to via either employment, if it's someone who is seeking employment. And due to the lack of the qualifications required in order to advance in their placements or in the job sector that they wish to enrol in, they can choose upon discussions with the Employment Department whether they want to continue doing some upskilling through paths.

2850 The collaboration with the prison itself is basically for the prisoners there at the moment. They have a chance to go and upskill, be it through their carpentry workshop or they have got a computer suite.

Rehab the same, it is out of choice. And then the Youth Services are referred through NEET. So usually it is a referral of different Departments that are relating to offering employment or employability or advice to Members of the community who may need to upskill.

2855 **Hon. A Sanchez:** And where can people find information about this? Is there any information online? Are there any guidance notes? Is there any anything published online where people can refer to?

Hon. C P Santos: At the moment we are doing it via the actual Departments, or for example as I said employment, prison, rehabilitation, youth or supported employment.

It has not been an individual referral getting in touch with the Ministry. Usually it is a referral through one of these Departments themselves, which is about upskilling due to employability. So for example, when they go to a clinic at the employment they will be advised parties on offer for you.

2865 We are rolling it out to all the other to all the other Departments. We started on a pilot scheme to make sure that it worked with the support of employment company. So it was offered to those people who are in the supported employment programme. But it is not something that we get direct from individuals into the Ministry. They need to go through one of the programmes or Departments.

2870 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mr Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful. Grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer.

2875 I just wanted to ask in relation to some of the comments you just said. He mentioned that this was a pilot scheme. I think we had conversations earlier on how this was previously targeted at people transitioning from supported employment to rehabilitation and prison, and then this has been expanded to include more individuals.

The last time I asked this question last month in this House, I think there were 11 individuals between 16 and 24 enrolled. But given that the Hon. Minister has just acknowledged that he has opened up the course, can you confirm whether this number has increased or does he have a number for how many people are enrolled on it now?

Hon. C P Santos: This was never a pilot scheme. The pilot scheme was the opening it up to supported employment. This is when we created PATHS. It was for all the five different Departments. We decided to pilot it with supportive employment because it was within a complement that we were offering.

I am not sure what the numbers are exactly of people taking it up. I would need a notification of this, but it is easily accessible, I can ask tomorrow and let you know.

2890 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mr Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

2895 I am just seeking clarification here. As I understand it from the Hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, the scheme is covering rehabilitation, youth and prisoners, but it also includes supported employment. I know that supported employment has quite strict criteria and is limited in its scope as to who it can help. As you know, the Hon. Minister and I have been in discussions about a couple of people who did not quite meet that criteria, but it seems that path does not quite catch them.

2900 There are a few people in need of support who go through the net. I understand that the Hon. Minister's intention initially was that this scheme would pick those people up in the net. Would he be able to confirm if people would say serious medical issues that affect them getting a normal job, but are not young, are not a prisoner, or are not a drug addict? Would they be picked up in the scheme too? Because I am sure that they would like the comfort of that?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the first point that I think you have missed is my first one was employment. So it is upskilling participants who are actively seeking employment.

So we have got five different pathways you can go in through, as I said: (1) Employment; (2) Windmill Hill; (3) Rehabilitation Services; (4) Youth Services; (5) Supported Employment.

2910 But the first one is employment. Anyone who is seeking employment does not necessarily need to be a young person. It can be anyone from any age who is currently seeking employment or currently enrolled in a training scheme, or even who are through the employment scheme and want to just upskill. They can do this through the Employment Department.

Hon. C Sacarello: Sorry, I am just seeking clarification, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for that answer.

2915 But obviously the ETB provides some support in this sense. I was just trying to find the differentiation between the two in terms of what added benefit someone would have going into PATHS, as opposed to down the ETB route.

2920 **Hon. C P Santos:** PATHS is a supplementary programme. It is not a standalone programme that will get you employed. The ETB, then there could be someone who enrolls in the ETB and they are offered PATHS as something that they can take on. This will be rolled out in September by the way, through the employment. So through the ETB. And we are rolling them out as soon as we can possibly make them happen in all of them.

2925 But in September or hopefully earlier, we will roll this out through the ETB. This is what I meant by employment. So you will be offered that as one of your options.

2930 But doing PATHS is not like doing a degree or doing a course at college. You can do it in your own time. You can do it whilst you are working. You can do it whilst you are trying to upskill to get work. So for example, these are series of courses that are broken down into different categories of fields that you want to get into, whether it is general skills, construction or customer service or retail.

2935 And there are courses that you do to upskill and you can choose to do these, but you do not need to. It is not like a course at the college that you need to commit to a month of it. You can do it in your own time, according to when it is offered, but you can carry on living your life. It is not like you are there, committed to five or six days a week to do this.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mr Bossino.

2940 **Hon. D J Bossino:** That sparks an interest on this side of the House. So in the offers that his Department is making, which is I think he has mentioned the five different PATHS. In any of that, is there what used to be known as the Future Job Strategy, which was heralded as a new policy when the new 2011 administration walked into office still a thing? Or has that been abandoned?

2945 **Hon. C P Santos:** The point of the Government is to offer employment opportunities and the Future Job Strategy is something that has been working and is constantly developing. So this is in addition to basically getting people into employment.

2950 What we find is that, from my experiences, we need to offer everyone as many opportunities as possible. So this is the beginning of hopefully what we will continue to create in new programmes, so that people will have more opportunities to develop, more opportunities to upskill so that people have more choices.

So this is an extension on what we do as a Government with regard to employment.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mrs Sanchez.

2955 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether the PATHS programme has replaced the supported employment model or is it another avenue as well as?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, it is another avenue. The Supported Employment Programme has now been extended so we have the Supported Employment Company that works as a company to employ people. But we also have the Supported Employment Programme.

2960 We just did a conference not that long ago to get more interest from employers, to get more people into direct employment. So the Supported Employment Programme still works to support employers and employees with regard to getting people into employment.

2965 PATHS is essentially a chance for you to get certification and upskill. So, for example, you may want to do a course in Microsoft Office, as one of the things we have identified, after we have looked at over 45,000 vacancies to see where the gaps are with regard to locals, and see what the different pathways are. We have construction, retail, development, courses on mental health and well-being, hospitality and care, and generic employability skills.

2970 So this is an opportunity for someone. It is essentially like going to a library and getting books and going to the reference library and studying, but in a way that works for you. And it is a bespoke type of course for a person that does not feel like they have the necessary qualifications so they can get a little bit more knowledge. As well as that, some people lack confidence or self-esteem, so we also work on that. What the aim of PATHS is, is to give people more chances. We are becoming more employable, in a holistic way.

2975 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q616/2024
Parasports –
Establishment of plans

Clerk: Question is 616. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: What plans does the Government have to establish parasports in Gibraltar?

2980 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2985 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, coincidentally, we set out we sent out invitations to a parasports taster day to several of our Government Ministries on Friday, 14th June 2024. We have been developing this since February 2024, and this event is scheduled to take place on 4th July 2024 as a preliminary session ahead of our main event, which will be a full corporate and family Parasports Day in September 2024 in Gibraltar, which will become an annual event.

2990 The Parasports Association has already procured 10 wheelchairs specifically for this event. The day will feature opportunities for private entities to register as teams, followed by sessions for families and friends to participate. Activities will include wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, and goalball among other sports.

In addition to this, we are looking at having an annual Rock Relay by the end of this year.

2995 The main goal of our Parasports Taster Day and full sports day will be to promote inclusivity, provide competitive opportunities and encourage physical fitness and social integration for people with disabilities, aside from having community engagement and raising awareness.

We are working on this together with the GSLA and the Ministry of Sport who, as the Sports Authority, will build on the prototypes we are designing and facilitating.

3000 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. I just want to ask, in relation to the work that has been carried out, and I appreciate he informs this House that recent moves have been made in this respect.

But does the Hon. Minister have any idea of the number of parasports athletes that would be here in Gibraltar? So that would give you some data, which would then guide on the Government policy and what to do with the parasports plans?

3005

Hon. C P Santos: With regard to data and parasports, this is aimed at people who have physical disabilities, but it is not exclusive to those with physical disabilities.

A lot of it is about the promotion of parasports as a whole will include those people who are not necessarily people with disabilities. I do not have the figures of who would want to go into this, it is the same as asking me how many people want to go into pickleball. I do not know. But I can find out what type of interest has been in the past, if you if you would like that data.

3010

Hon. G Origo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and grateful to the Minister for his answer.

And then, if I may just ask in terms of the actual sports, has consideration been given to what sports in particular in the parasports? I think he described it as an annual event that might take place, so will there be some type of league that is created, or what are the plans the Government have in mind in relation to parasports?

3015

Hon. C P Santos: The type of sports, we have someone working for the Ministry of Equality who is a para-athlete. So he is leading on this project as such.

3020

We are we are trying to bring awareness to parasports at the moment, and we are working very closely with the Ministry of Sport and the GSLA, who will then take on that we are doing it from an equality perspective at the moment, because we have got that member of staff with us, and then we will see how it can progress.

3025

I am not quite sure whether where we are at with leagues and how that will work, but it is important to give every individual the opportunity to be able to take up sports or any other activity that they so wish.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q617/2024
UK Dive Show –
Business attracted

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Clerk: Question 617. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, what business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the UK Dive Show in Coventry at the beginning of March this year?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the UK Dive Show is the largest dive show in the UK and it was an opportunity to target the consumers directly and the UK dive industry in general. We have now been listed in the Dive Worldwide website that was launched on 17th June 2024, which is very positive news.

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And attending the show has not only promoted Gibraltar as a significant diving destination, but has also provided us with essential networking opportunities and market insight required in the development of this niche market within our Tourism sector.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you to the Minister for his answer.

In respect to the reference to diving, I believe from having looked this up myself, that the UK Dive Show relates to scuba diving and underwater sea diving more in particular. So I wondered whether the Government has any plans to adopt a Government scuba-diving school of some kind, or what the actual purpose was for attending a scuba-diving show in the first place?

3050

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, as part of Tourism, we need to promote the destination.

So we have decided as well to look at the niche markets in order to be able to attract numbers of people who would choose Gibraltar as a place for leisure, not just for business.

3055

We realised upon further inspection of what we have to offer as Gibraltar, that one of the things that we have, which is very unique to us in this area, is scuba diving. There is a huge interest, something that I was not really aware of until I did some research. We have a lot of wrecks. We have a nice coral reefs. We have a beautiful area by Rosia Bay. There is a lot of interest and it is something that we are promoting from a tourism perspective in order to bring more people into Gibraltar.

3060

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q618/2024
Dusseldorf BOOT Show –
Business attracted

Clerk: Question 618. The Hon. G. Origo.

3065

Hon. G. Origo: What business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the BOOT show in Dusseldorf earlier this year?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the first visit was a networking opportunity and it was instrumental in understanding the scale of the show and evaluating its value should we choose to attend as an exhibitor in the future.

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Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister says that the purpose of attending this show was to network. Can I ask if the networking was successful; and if so how that has generated any business for Gibraltar?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, as I said, this was to evaluate its value, so we did not attend as an exhibitor. We attended as part of an audience. I sent the CEO of tourism over to check out whether this was a positive conference and something that would bring business to Gibraltar.

They focus on yachting, scuba diving as well, and anything to do with water sports and activities.

3085

We are still to assess whether we want to continue attending and become an exhibitor. We are working together with local stakeholders who might get involved with us, because with a lot of these conferences, we go with someone because we are only there to market the destination. But then there are people who then decide to work more closely with people and bring the tours and it is tour operator-based.

So there was no business per se yet. This happened a few months ago, and as I said, it was a chance for us to meet different tour operators, see if it was of interest. There was over 214,000 visitors. So we need to assess whether this is something we want to take on in the future.

3090

Next question.

Q619/2024
Seatrade Cruise Global 2024 –
Business attracted

Clerk: Question 619. The Hon. G. Origo.

Hon. G. Origo: What business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the Seatrade Cruise Global 2024, in Miami Beach, USA, earlier this year?
3095

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, Seatrade Global in Miami is a key show in the global cruising market as all the major cruise companies attend the show.
3100

It is difficult to quantify, but attending this type of conference is clearly working as figures are up to 12% from 2023 to the current year; and bookings for 2025 are up 24% from the current 2024. So in actual fact, we are up 18% from 2019.
3105

Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, grateful for that answer.

I would ask the Minister what the aim or purpose of this trip would be, but I suppose it would be very evident, which is to network or attract new businesses or more cruise calls to Gibraltar. So I will skip that and go to my next question. Which would be: was that achieved? And if so, how?
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Because in answer to questions in Parliament last month, we understand that £14,000 was spent to send two delegates to Miami. And I just want to assess whether this trip was worthwhile or not.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I think the trip was very worth it.
3115

As I said, we are already 18% above 2019, which is before COVID. And then at £14,000 for two delegates to travel to Miami, when you come to think about it we are at already 25% from last year. And if we look at the figures that every cruise ship visitor spend is £52.30 per person, this means that we would only need 265 people to come down and spend that in order to get to the £14,000 that we spent to bring, maybe, I think it is over 40 cruise ships between 2024 and 2025.
3120

So really, I think it is very worth it.

Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you. Thanks to the Hon. Minister for his answer.

He does make references to the cruise calls being better than they were in previous years, and these have been upped by 18%. I do not know if he compared that to 2019 or what was the reference?
3125

But I wanted to ask whether he connects the increases in cruise calls here to Gibraltar, to this trip, which I asked for in the beginning of my questions. My question was whether this business trip, per se, has attracted any new business to Gibraltar. And if he answers that a particular cruise has called in Gibraltar as a result of that trip, then I will take that answer for what it is worth.
3130

But I just wanted to inquire from him whether he has made any contacts, made any networks, or secured further calls to Gibraltar.

Hon. C P Santos: I know you have asked, Madam Speaker, I know the Hon. Member has asked about *this* particular trip, but the cruising industry works on a 12 to 24 months advance bookings;

3135 which means that the work that we have seen in 2024 is of the work that my predecessor did two years ago.

This is not a conference that I just went to this year. This is something that we go annually and it is something that we have clearly seen the increase.

3140 So I will see the numbers of these bookings reflected in 2025, which we are already seeing an increase, and 2026. So does this particular one trip prove a success? Well, we go every year, and every year the numbers keep on increasing. And as I said, we need about 265 people only in a year from cruise ships that come with £5000 to spend just that money without counting any expenditure on shore excursions or any port fees or anything.

3145 So I think that it is money well invested in making Gibraltar a destination that people want to continue coming; and on cruises especially.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q620/2024
Windmill Hill Prison –
Reintegration support for leavers

Clerk: Question 620. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

3150 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, when a prisoner leaves Windmill Hill Prison after they have served their sentence, what support is in place to ease their reintegration into society?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

3155 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, our Ministry has created the Rehabilitation and Prison Leavers Work Reintegration Programme under the Supported Employment Programme, and there is a team specifically working on this. This Programme aims to increase employability and provide employment opportunities for members of our community who may require additional support. This includes those serving a
3160 prison sentence.

It is important to highlight that in order for the prison cohort to have a smooth transition to life outside of the prison setting, this requires a co-ordinated approach. Our team at the Ministry has been liaising with senior management at HMP Windmill Hill, Ministry of Justice, Probation and Community Service teams.

3165 Support for the prison cohort starts when they are institutionalised, as this is an opportunity to upskill and prepare prison leavers for release through quality education and training opportunities. The education opportunities within the Prison are being developed together with the College of Further Education. Additionally, through our PATHS programme, the prison cohort will be able to avail themselves of the opportunity to take online accredited courses to increase
3170 their employability, as well as a variety of workshops with qualified practitioners, which will target their mental health and well-being.

Our research has established the various job skill gaps within the labour market in Gibraltar, and we have created pathways to employment for these sectors. This means that upon successful completion of the PATHS Programme during their time serving sentence at HMP Windmill Hill, the
3175 prisoner will be able to join our work reintegration programme after release. This initiative will not only give the individual a sense of structure, purpose and empowerment, it will also assist in the reduction of re-offending rates.

3180 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for the very comprehensive answer, because the Hon. Minister said that it has been worked upon. But when can we expect this programme to commence?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, this has been worked on for the past few months. I have had meetings with my colleagues, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Care, who together will have what happens after they leave prison with regard to that side of things.

3185 Currently we are just waiting for a connection of the computers at the moment. So this is where we are at. We have designed all the programmes, and now we have to make sure that the physical setup is there. So hopefully we will start as soon as this happens, hopefully very soon.

Madam Speaker: Yes?

3190

Hon. J Ladislaus: In terms of accommodation, because we have heard about the programme, which is very welcome indeed. Because to date, to my knowledge, there is no such programme in place for that reintegration.

3195 But what about accommodation? Has that been looked at? For example, a halfway house sort of sort of programme where people can reintegrate.

Hon. C P Santos: With regard to housing, I am not the correct person to answer. I think this is something that you may need to give notice of and my colleague over here at housing may be able to answer this. But we are looking at ... From my side, I am doing this through employment. So it is about reintegration with regard to employment.

3200

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q621/2024

Labour inspectors/Government officials – Non-registered workers apprehended

Clerk: Question 621. The Hon. C Sacarello.

3205 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Government please provide a breakdown of interventions where its labour inspectors or other Government officials have questioned and/or apprehended individuals or companies who are locally registered and licensed, but who are using workers not registered with the ETB or any other valid authority?

3210 Please list this activity monthly for the last six months, including a separate column for fines issued to each entity per month and another column for fines actually settled by each entity per month.

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

3215 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the Labour Inspectorate does not conduct interventions. The Inspectorate is tasked with the enforcement of our Employment Laws and are empowered to enter, at all reasonable times, any premises or place liable to inspection as may be necessary for ascertaining whether the provisions of the Employment Regulations are adhered to.

3220 The breakdown of inspections undertaken over the last six months including total of fines issued and paid is as follows:

January 24 – 77 inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Fixed-penalty notices zero; fixed-penalty notices paid, zero.

3225 February 24 – 132 inspections. Seven employers contravening Employment Regulation. Two fixed-penalty notices issued; one fixed-penalty notice paid.

March 24 – 81 inspections. Two employers contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

April 24 – 53 inspections. Four employers contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

3230 May 24 – 48 number of inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

And June 24 – 10 inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

3235 The Government is committed to the eradication of illegal labour, and that level playing field is maintained by ensuring that all businesses are compliant with the Employment Regulations.

	No. of Inspections	No. of Employers contravening Employment	Fixed Penalty Notices Issued	Fixed Penalty Notices Paid
Jan-24	77	1	0	0
Feb-24	132	7	2	1
Mar-24	81	2	0	0
Apr-24	53	4	0	0
May-24	48	1	0	0
Jun-24	10	1	0	0

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister, and that last comment there certainly makes sense, and I think that everyone on this side of the House would concur with that sentiment.

3240 The figures you provided, just looking at them very quickly seem to fluctuate in terms of the number of inspections carried out per month. Would the Minister care to explain how the Department works in terms of how it sets its targets for finding companies that are worth investigating and how they go about determining how many inspections to carry out on a monthly basis?

3245 **Hon. C P Santos:** I would need to find out exactly what the figures are.

I cannot imagine that there are set figures that we need to inspect a certain amount of employers. A lot of it comes from maybe concerns that we may have had. As you may see with figures, there are a lot of inspections. And then employers who are found contravening Employment Regulation and not necessarily all are served a fixed-penalty notice.

3250 We start by giving them a warning and then we issue a fixed penalty notice after we have found them as repeat offenders.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for that supplementary reply.

3255 But also, would the Hon. Minister be willing to provide information once gathered and ascertained as to the details governing the decision making about inspecting? And also, if the Hon. Minister would not mind providing some information on perhaps a breakdown between how the Department goes about investigating themselves and the level of whistleblowing and how they react to that type of report.

3260 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I will discuss this with, of course, my Department and give you the pertinent information that does not break the Employment Regulations confidentiality. So if you send me an email to remind me, I will be able to get you that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q622/2024

Airport –

Adequately resourced; efficiently offloading

3265 **Clerk:** Question 622. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Airport adequately resourced to deal with the offloading of luggage in an efficient manner?

3270 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, *Gibair*, the Ground Handling company is adequately resourced for the current operations as they stand although these are kept under constant review and form part of the consultations that are held with the airlines.

The Airport is bi-seasonal and has to be able to cope with a busy summer schedule and a quieter winter schedule, and the current levels allow it to operate comfortably all year.

In addition to this, there is constant active engagement with the airlines so, where possible, arrival times are not conflicted. Therefore, aircraft do not arrive at the same time.

3280 On the occasions when there are four aircraft scheduled to arrive in one morning – currently twice a week – delays at the originating airport, weather and other operational factors can affect these and the resource available will get stretched. But this is not uncommon in the aviation industry and we are able to cope well.

3285 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Minister says that he is in effect satisfied with the current arrangements, and he sets out the attempts which are made in order to avoid, in effect, a clogging of the system. Which is the reason why I asked the question, because it was put to me that there was one incident – I suppose in many respects it could be that we are victims of our own success in that regard, that there were I think three flights on that occasion, and on this occasion the information that I have, unless it is in any way wrong, was on this occasion, three flights – which resulted in massive delays as far as the luggage-handling is concerned, and indeed by adequately resourced airports.

3295 What I am also referring to is specifically whether there are basic amenities available for those passengers who have to wait. One issue is to address the administrative backlog which results as a result of these flights coming at the same time. And the other issue is offering literally water to passengers, I was told that there was not even water available even to purchase or certainly not freely available.

So I would ask him, please, to put himself on inquiry as to whether, in fact, it is working as well as he is suggesting in his response.

3300 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, what is your question? Is there a question?

Hon. D J Bossino: Would he put himself into inquiry to check whether, in fact – I thought the question was pretty clear – or whether in fact the response that he has given is as accurately as

3305 he has suggested to this House. It may just be that the information he has been provided, he has not checked. And I am putting to the Hon. Member a set of circumstances which is suggestive of the answer not being as accurate as he may have been lulled into believing.

Hon. C P Santos: Yes. As far as I am concerned, there has been one occurrence of this. You state there was three flights. My information is there was four flights and that this only happened one time, where four flights were meant to land within two hours and we had them arriving within 35 minutes with a total load of 580 passengers inbound.

This stretched operations, but this is something that we could not necessarily avoid. These were delays for various reasons on their side from the departing airport. There are very short periods of high intensity, and then there are periods where there are no movements at all. One incident does not necessarily prove to me that we are not adequately resourced.

Whether giving passengers a bottle of water or not, I will ask about that. It is not something that I have had information on. But the original question was about the offloading of luggage. So I got the information with regard to what our procedures are with regard to luggage.

3320 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, I take the hon. Member's point but I was also thinking more widely as far as adequately resourcing.

But can I just suggest to him that that he, in looking at this matter – and I would encourage him to do so in greater detail – and ask him so that I can formulate it in the form of a question that whether he will look at the arrangements which are currently in place with the luggage handler which is currently contracted by the Government to provide this service. And in that context, whether it is possible to consider greater flexibility so that we do not have a repeat.

It may only happen once in a blue moon, as he is suggesting but I think that once, and given the high numbers that he referred to in terms of offloading of passengers, it would just give a very bad impression of Gibraltar Airport and Gibraltar more widely. So I think it is important that we get this absolutely right.

3330 So the question is whether he would look at the contractual arrangements to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility so that on the ground this does not happen again.

3335 **Hon. C P Santos:** I will look into it, I imagine so, but from my discussions this has never really happened before. A lot of it is about how both carriers like BA has offloading luggage in containers, the other ones have loose. So this has been a mishap with regard to timings.

But we do not control the air spaces and the timings of departures and arrivals. It is not something that we necessarily can control.

3340 I know that on one occasion could be a very negative impression on Gibraltar. But, you know, when you look back at what has happened at the airport, Gatwick, who had to close that traffic control this weekend; and Manchester Airport, who also had to cancel flights.

I do not think this is ... I do not know the word, there is a phrase in Spanish that says "*mata un gato y llámame un mata gato*". Like if something happens once, it does not mean that this will be the reputation of the Airport. *(Interjection)*

Chief Minister (F R Picardo): A swallow does not a summer make.

Hon. C P Santos: Exactly, that is the English version of it.

3350 But I will look into it. Yes, I will discuss with my team at the Gibraltar Air Terminal and see if there are ways that we can make it even more seamless. But this is not something that seems to be a problem that has been brought to my attention before.

But yes, we will look into it.

3355 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q623/2024

**Gibraltar Airport –
Plans to increase destinations to UK**

Clerk: Question 623. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does Government have current and concrete plans to increase destinations to the UK from Gibraltar Airport?

3360

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, we are constantly looking at increasing the amount of destinations served from the UK; and these discussions are commercial in nature and hence we are not in a position to elaborate at this time.

3365

Hon. D J Bossino: Just trying to ask as much information as he can provide, subject to the caveat that he has just put to us, which is that there is a commercial sensitivity at play here, which I respect and acknowledge.

3370

But is he – I will put it as widely as this – is there any information that he can provide? So what I am looking at is things like what destinations is he looking at? I am assuming, given that we do not yet have a deal in place – and we may never do – that we are looking at UK destinations? And in that regard, is he able to at least say which destinations are we looking at?

3375

Because I think there has been a drop in the number of destinations that Gibraltar Airport services. And also, if I may, whether we are looking at more than the two current carriers which service Gibraltar in terms of airlines.

Hon. C P Santos: Currently it is too sensitive where we are with regard to the deal.

3380

But rest assured that I am working hard on this. I cannot really give you much more information than that at the moment.

Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. Minister says ‘the deal’. I referred to the deal, which is possibly a different deal. In other words, the post-Brexit deal. When he refers to ‘the deal’, is he saying that there is one commercial avenue that he is considering which will – and this is the purpose of my question – result in possibly greater destinations being serviced to and from Gibraltar?

3385

So are we talking one commercial deal that the Hon. Member is working on, and he is very keen to divulge, but is unable as a result of the strictures to which he is subject?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I meant ‘*The deal*’. The one and only deal. Not a commercial deal, but yes, as I have said before, I am in conversations to hopefully expand, but there are not many more details that I can give you at this point.

3390

Madam Speaker: All right. We have that one question outstanding, which is Question 613. Does the Hon. Member have any supplementaries? No?

3395

Anybody else have supplementaries on 613? All right. I think that is the end of the questions on my list.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): So, Madam Speaker, this week, unfortunately, for reasons related to travel, I shall be unable to be in the House on Thursday at 3 p.m.

3400 So I therefore propose that the House should now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 in the morning when I shall be taking my questions. And thereafter, Madam Speaker, I should hope it assists Hon. Members to know that it is my intention to, on Friday, adjourn the House till Monday morning, when I intend to take the First and Second Readings of the Appropriation Bill.

I therefore now move that the House should now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 in the morning.

3405 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Friday at 10:30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 a.m. Those in favour? Those against. Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Friday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.00 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 10.30 a.m. – 12.20 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 28th June 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 10.30 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with laying of papers

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 28th June 2024.
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

5 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with the laying of documents on the table.

Madam Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

Clerk: (vi) Papers to be laid – the Hon. the Chief Minister.

10

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Air Traffic Survey Report 2023, the Tourist Survey Report 2023, the Hotel Occupancy Survey Report 2023, the Employment Survey Report 2023 and the Annual Policing Plan 2024-25.

15

Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q487 and 643/2024

Manifesto commitments –

New home for Gibraltar Netball Association; building of new homes

Clerk: Chief Minister's questions.
Question 487. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Good morning, Madam Speaker.

20 Can the Government provide details of the chosen site, cost and expected completion date in respect of its commitment to provide the Gibraltar Netball Association with its own home?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

25 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 643.

Clerk: Question 643. The Hon. D J Bossino.

30 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please provide precise details of the number of government rental homes the Government intends to build, to include the size and location of each of those homes and when construction will commence.

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

35 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, our position remains as set out in answer to Question 679/2023.

40 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I note the Chief Minister's answer. I know he sometimes feels that I am a bit impatient or anxious, but given that the Gibraltar Netball Association have been nominated and chosen to host international games here in Gibraltar, is the Government satisfied that we will have the adequate facilities to be able to properly cater and be good hosts for those games without it being to the detriment of other sports? Sometimes we can use other locations to double up for netball, but it means the removal of allocations and maybe basketball has to suffer in its allocation timetable. I will be glad to hear if the Chief Minister is confident that we will proudly and rightfully host these games. We certainly look forward to the Netball Association having its own home.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes.

50 **Hon. D J Bossino:** We are curt in our responses. That is the style which the Hon. –

Madam Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

55 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I cannot say anything in advance of the question. What is the position, Madam Speaker? I cannot make any comment whatsoever? I simply use the preamble to –

60 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member is correct. Preambles need to be short. Preambles are allowed, with the proviso that the preamble is necessary to make the supplementary question understood. A statement as to something which is unrelated to the preamble, i.e. a statement which is unrelated to the supplementary, will not be allowed, because that just prolongs Question Time beyond that which is necessary. If the hon. Member needs to make a preamble to make the question understood – by way of example, the Hon. Mr Reyes talking about the netball issue and explaining that one sport, like basketball, may have to give up for another and that is why this is important – that is permissible, but a gratuitous statement for the sake of it will not be allowed before a supplementary.

The question?

70 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So be it. Madam Speaker, the Hon. the Chief Minister refers the House to the answer that he gave to Question 679 on 23rd November 2023. The position then, in response to one of my supplementaries, was that he would be announcing the proposals in respect of government housing when they are ready, and that when they are ready they would provide more details. He said it was not just a question of time but also as to location. Is the Hon. Chief Minister still not ready?

75 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is not about the Chief Minister being ready; it is about the plans being ready.

Hon. D J Bossino: When will the plans be ready?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, an announcement will be made when the plans are ready.

85 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is the Chief Minister concerned that he will not be able to comply and fulfil his commitment to the people of Gibraltar, which is now, as he says, government policy? The commitment is set out in the manifesto of the party opposite, which won the election, where it said, and I quote:

The GSLP Liberals would, if returned to office, build additional general rental stock in housing [...] the balance of rental homes will need to be increased.

There is a reference there to rental homes. Will the Government be able to comply and fulfil that commitment in the lifetime of this Parliament?

90 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the answer to the first question that the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether I think that we will fail that commitment, is no. The answer to the second question the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether I believe we will fulfil that commitment, is yes.

95 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And by way of 'fulfilment', what does he mean? Are we talking about the houses and the keys ready to be delivered to the applicants on the housing waiting list for rental housing, or simply a commencement of the construction?

100 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we expect to fulfil the commitment we have given as set out clearly in our manifesto. Whether or not we do, of course, is a matter for the public in Gibraltar to determine by the time that the next general election is called.

105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** With the greatest of respect to the Hon. the Chief Minister, I do not agree with that proposition. Whether or not they do fulfil the commitment is whether or not they comply with what they said, which is that there would be a provision for additional general rental stock. It says that they will build additional rental stock. So, what is the commitment? This is why I am drilling down on the detail. Is it that the houses will be built, or simply that they will start building?

110 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I confess that with all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I find it difficult to see how he expects me to provide any more detail than the very extensive detail that he himself has referred to, which is already set out in our manifesto. Our commitment is what is set out in the manifesto, and I think that it is a sufficiently clear commitment that it garnered the majority of support during the course of the last general election
115 campaign and produced the result that it produced.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q494/2024

**Payments to construction companies –
Details of payments made since 2018**

Clerk: Question 494. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

120 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can the Government provide a list of total payments
made by the Government, any government-owned entity, or the Savings Bank to construction
companies, broken down by company, identifying the specific entity and by particular contract or
works for each of the following financial years: (1) 2018-19; (2) 2019-21; (3) 2021-22; (4) 2022-23;
(5) 2023-24?

125

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the information requested is too
voluminous to provide in the timeframe available.

130

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. This question was filed last month and it was carried over, at my
request, for this month. How much longer does the Government need to provide this information?

135

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think it is relatively impossible to be able to provide
this information. The hon. Gentleman has asked whether the Government can provide a list of
total payments made by the Government, any Government-owned entity or the Savings Bank to
construction companies, broken down by company, identifying each of them and by particular
contract or works for each of the following financial years, going back, in effect, five financial
years. That means that if we have bought a box of nails from one particular construction company,
140 in the Housing Works Agency, or maybe the ERS has bought a box of screws from another
construction company, or we have entered into a contract for the construction of 800 properties
with one particular company, each of those would be a payment that would have to be identified
and provided under the list that the hon. Gentleman is casting. This is the sort of net that John
Cortes thinks is very bad for the environment when it is deployed at sea, and it requires, in effect,
145 that every civil servant we have available should trawl through all of the payments that each of
their Departments have made for five years, to identify any such payment. We do not think that
it is possible to do this with the sort of degree of accuracy that we are required to ensure that we
provide for answers in this House, so I would gently ask the hon. Gentleman to consider what it is
that he really wants, and to see whether he can phrase his question in a way that we might better
150 be able to comply with.

155

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The thing is, Madam Speaker, the answer the hon. Member has just given
argues against his original answer. His original answer was that the information could not be
provided in the available time. I pointed out to him that this was last month's question, which is
replayed this month because they did not answer it last time, so I was asking for time, which would
have been in keeping with his original answer. What he is now suggesting is that it cannot be done
at all. Can I ask him whether it is the original answer? Is the situation the original answer, which is
that the Government requires time, which is what he originally said? And if so, how much time do
they need? I understand the example he has given about the nails, of course, but I do struggle to
160 think that in the same way as there would be overall control of the Budget by Treasury, I assume,
in terms of spending and so on, it must be possible in today's day and age, where everything is
computerised – we are not going back to written ledgers – someone can ask for a printout of
payments made to company X. It should not be as problematic as the Chief Minister suggesting;
nor did his original answer suggest it was problematic other than in relation to time.

165

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman knows that the answer that the information requested is too voluminous to provide in the timeframe available is the standard answer that is provided in Parliament – in Westminster or here – when the further follow-up answer is of the sort that I am going to provide.

170 What I am trying to indicate to the hon. Gentleman is that things do not work, even in the digital age, in the press-a-button-and-printout-appears manner in which he seems to think it does. It might work like that in a small organisation, but the Government, and indeed the Government-owned companies and the Savings Bank are many organisations, and bringing all that together in the way that the hon. Gentleman has suggested is simply not possible. It perhaps is possible if we
175 were to spend a year devoting resources to simply provide him the answer to this question.

I cannot imagine that there is any reason why the Opposition really want this much information and want to know whether a box of nails has been bought from a construction company by one part of the Government. I imagine the Opposition legitimately wish the information in the context of payments to construction companies over a particular amount, or in respect of particular
180 things, and I am very happy to go back, if the hon. Gentleman wishes to rephrase in some way, to try to obtain that information and then come back and be able to provide the information across the floor of the House, knowing that we are providing information with the sort of accuracy that people expect that the Government provides information in this House, and hon. Members are entitled to require us to comply with that level of accuracy. But like this, this is not a question that
185 is possible for us to answer.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: With all due respect, I think the original answer was different to the supplementary answer, despite the Chief Minister's explanation. May I just seek your guidance, Madam Speaker? It is clear we are not going to get more than what we are getting today. I am
190 happy to go back and reframe a question. I would prefer not to be met with the answer then that it is presented within a period of six months. I would rather do it at the next available opportunity given that this is a May question. I would seek your guidance. I think the hon. Member is saying, given the tenor of his answer just now, that they would not object to a question being filed.

195 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, if it is helpful, that would be my view. I am very happy, if the hon. Gentleman wants to rephrase the question – which would make it a different question in any event – to, not for one moment, raise that sort of objection were it to be filed in a way that is better able to be answered.

200 **Madam Speaker:** Yes. My view is that following this exchange, if a question is going to be refiled that is going to be more specific, then it would differ from this question and I would not see, in any event, regardless of this exchange, that there would be a problem with infringing Rule 17.

Next question.

Q624/2024
New Care Agency offices –
Details of rental arrangements

205 **Clerk:** Question 624. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, on behalf of the Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can the Government confirm whether it is paying rent for the offices building in the dockyard area where it intends to move the staff of the Care Agency? If so, can the Government confirm the commencement date of this rent agreement, the monthly
210 rent cost and the duration of the contract?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the Government can confirm it is paying rent for the office in the dockyard area where it intends to move the staff of the Care Agency. The commencement date was 1st July 2023. The monthly rental cost is £25,307.33, paid from 1st April 2024. The duration of the contract will be 21 years.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Just to confirm, if the hon. Member has that information in front of him, the specific landlord with whom the rental agreement was entered into is who?

Hon. Chief Minister: I do not have that information, Madam Speaker. I do not have the actual rent agreement.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q625-26/2024

Civil servants representing Gibraltar at international events – Special leave conditions

Clerk: Question 625. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, can the hon. Member confirm whether the Government has changed its policy with respect to special leave conditions applied to civil servants who are representing Gibraltar in international capacities at international events?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 626.

Clerk: Question 626. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Can the hon. Member confirm whether special leave is being granted to civil servants involved in music or the arts who are representing Gibraltar at international events?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, government policy on special leave remains unchanged. The Principal Auditor's Report identified areas where adherence to the established guidelines had not been consistent across the public service. As a result, Government has been strictly applying the existing criteria. Requests for which no specific provision for special paid leave is in place are, therefore, not being granted. Special leave may be granted for public servants who are selected as contestants to participate in sports or other international events such as music or the arts.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer. If I may add a bit of background to the reason I have been asking this question, we have been of the understanding that in the past, officials who are representing Gibraltar – which would include the athletes, referees, coaches, technical directors – would all be granted special leave to be able to attend these events in which they are representing Gibraltar. But it is our understanding that recently this has been narrowed down to just the athletes or, as the Chief Minister referred to them, the contestants. I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on that, because in the same way that

my hon. Friend mentioned that next year we are going to be hosting the Netball World Youth Cup locally, I think it would be reasonable to suggest that we need all the officials to be allowed to take special leave, to be able to host and service this event properly. I would just like his thoughts on that.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, special unpaid leave would be granted to officials etc., the category of individual who are not the contestants. Hon. Members were, I remind them, delighted with the Principal Auditor's Report and felt that it had identified all the areas where we were failing – they said at the time, I seem to recall – to properly enforce rules etc., so I am surprised that they would not wish us to be now ensuring compliance with those areas where the Principal Auditor's Report highlighted that there was a failure to enforce rules. The process, therefore, is one which goes through special leave for those who are contestants etc. Those who are support will be able to take special unpaid leave, but they will not have special leave.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q627-29 and 647/2024
Boarders and Coastguard Agency –
Individuals failing training requirements; health and safety; working conditions;
resolution of issues leading to industrial action

Clerk: Question 627. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what policies and procedures are in place to deal with individuals who fail ongoing training requirements within the Borders and Coastguard Agency?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 628, 629 and 647.

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Clerk: Question 628. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, specifically what health and safety concerns have been expressed by Unite the Union in respect of the working conditions of Borders and Coastguard Agency officers; how far back do these concerns date and have these issues now been addressed satisfactorily?

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Clerk: Question 629. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: What measures have been put in place at the airport terminal to ensure that Borders and Coastguard Agency officers have access to rest facilities pending certainty on a UK-EU deal concerning Gibraltar?

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Clerk: Question 647. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Have agreements been reached to resolve the issues that led to industrial action by Borders and Coastguard officers last month; and, if so, what measures are being taken?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

300 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Borders and Coastguard Agency provides a comprehensive training programme to ensure that its officers achieve the standards set and required by the pertinent external agencies. This programme is constantly reviewed to ensure that officers remain competent to carry out their obligations. Any officer who may fail to achieve these standards is provided guidance, mentored and retrained to assist them in reaching the
305 required standard. The Borders and Coastguard Agency carries out various roles relating to immigration and security. This allows management to deploy its officers until the required standards are achieved in relation to each role.

No health and safety concerns were reported by Unite the Union to the Borders and Coastguard Agency. Nevertheless, following from recent meetings held between the Government and Unite the Union representatives, an independent health and safety consultant has been
310 engaged to review and identify possible health and safety hazards at the air terminal. These facilities are also used by other employees who are not Borders and Coastguard Agency officers.

I can confirm that Borders and Coastguard Agency officers have always enjoyed access to rest facilities at the air terminal building since it was opened in 2012. Furthermore, officers also have
315 access to enjoy rest facilities at the Borders and Coastguard Agency headquarters, which is located adjacent to the perimeter of the airport terminal.

Following on from meetings held with Unite the Union, an agreement has been reached to address, over a 90-day period, several issues raised, including the carrying out of minor works and the procurement of items which were not considered to be adequate
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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful. Madam Speaker, I am on Question 627. Are all BCA officers who fail ongoing training requirements disciplined in an equal manner?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I have no indication that they are not.
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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I am at Question 628. May I ask, if no health and safety concerns were reported, for what reason was an independent health and safety consultant employed to review?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, for the simple reason that the Government believed and believes that there were no serious health and safety issues at all, but Unite the Union had, through its members, raised this issue but were unable to point to any in particular. And so, in order to try to determine whether there were in fact any health and safety issues, it was agreed that if we simply appointed somebody independent, they would be able to tell us whether there
330 were any such issues. The Government, as an employer, will not stand idly by and tolerate a workplace having health and safety issues, so we had no difficulty in agreeing to bring somebody independent to make a determination. Given that Unite and its members might have raised the
335 issue but were not able to point to anything, we might very easily simply have said, 'Well, look, if you cannot actually point to anything, there is nothing here to do,' but because it is a health and safety issue, we had no difficulty in resolving the dispute between us and the union on the basis
340 of bringing an external third party to check.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Just pulling on the thread of that review, by when does the Hon. the Chief Minister expect the review to conclude, and will the results be available to the public?
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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not know about things being available to the public. When the Government carries out, working with the union, a health and safety review of a workplace, it does not tend to publish it. Certainly, it will be available to the union and to the Government, and if there were to be a dispute between us, I am sure that one of the parties may
350 resolve it by publishing.

I do not know that I have any statement here about the time in which the review will be finished. I think we have already commissioned it. The 90 days that are relevant relate to addressing particular issues – seriously, not issues which I believe in any way relate to health and safety, so there is no separate health and safety review check period that I have here.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, may I ask, on my Question 647, if agreements have been reached? The Chief Minister says agreements were reached to do works over a 90-day period, I think he said. Can he give us a bit more information about the works that would be conducted in that period of 90 days specifically? Does that include, for example, a mess room? Are there other things? Does he have a list of those works?

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Hon. Chief Minister: I do have a list, and it does not include a mess room, for the reason I have already given: that there were already rest facilities, Madam Speaker, at the Airport and elsewhere. The list says this: 'Move the BCA lockers in the level 4 search area to the alternative locker room; provide an additional fridge and microwave in the existing mess room at the Gibraltar Airport; provide adequate monitor raisers at the OCC; provide blinds at the OCC to limit glare; provide the means for additional ventilation at the OCC through the provision of freestanding fans; provide a microwave at the OCC; generally remodel the OCC to meet BCA's operational needs and in keeping with health and safety guidelines, but this is likely to take longer than the 90-day period; repair the damaged glass door on the first level; change all ill-suited seating in the areas that were visited where visual display equipment is frequently used; repair the broken door immediately on exiting the large lift at the ground floor; provision of three new trolleys, if these are suitable and meet the BCA's needs in the exercise of their duties; address general cleanliness of the airport infrastructure; provide car charging points in areas of relevance determined jointly by the BCA and GATL; the relocation of the desk, arising from health and safety concerns, that is placed directly under the roller belt in level 3; clear the pedestrian area of debris and old equipment and provide additional waste bins of 100-litre capacity.'

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful for that. The 90-day period presumably will run till the end August, because I think the meetings held with the Government were at the end May. Is there an agreed review period once all these things happen? And subject to those things happening which the Chief Minister has listed in his supplementary answer just now, does that mean that all matters which were raised are resolved satisfactorily?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the date of the letter between the Government and the union is 7th June 2024, so 90 days will be 90 days after that.

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I believe that most issues have been resolved. I do not know whether there are other issues that might arise in the context of the ongoing discussions, but there is a good exchange of communications. I do not know whether Unite the Union continue to enjoy the negotiating rights in respect of the BCA. I understand that there have been some changes there also, and that the relationship with the other union representing BCA officers is equally good, if not better.

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I am not able to say more at this stage, but I am very pleased that we did not get to a stage where Gibraltar was the one causing a difficulty in access to Gibraltar through the land Frontier at the Airport or at the Port, because frankly I think it would have been unconscionable to see industrial action affect those that need to come into Gibraltar and those that want to come into Gibraltar. I am very pleased that we were able to resolve this matter, and I commend those who resolved it.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q631 and 648-51/2024

**Treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union –
Impact re importing goods from the UK; number of companies awaiting outcome before
investing in Gibraltar; impact of recent European elections on timing; whether new round of
negotiations to be held before UK general election; timespan of new treaty; whether
discussions held with Spanish government on role of Spanish police**

400 **Clerk:** Question 630. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Good morning, Madam Speaker.

In the event of a negotiated outcome, what is the likelihood of there being a negative impact on the ability to import certain goods from the UK?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 631 and 648 to 651.

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Clerk: Question 631. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Does the Government have any idea of the number of companies not investing in Gibraltar while they await the outcome of the treaty negotiations?

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Clerk: Question 648. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what impact will the recent European parliamentary elections have on the timing of the negotiations on a treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union?

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Clerk: Question 649. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will there be any new formal round of negotiations on a treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the European Union ahead of the UK general elections at the end of July?

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Clerk: Question 650. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Is the Government seeking to negotiate an enduring treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU, or one that will have a four-year time span?

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Clerk: Question 651. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Following the answer given by the Spanish government in the Spanish Senate, dated 22nd May 2024, to the question submitted by Sr José Landaluce Calleja and others, number 14453 on file 684/5129, in relation to its view of the proposed role that Spanish police would have in the event of an agreement for a treaty, has the Government discussed that answer or the subject matter with the Government of Spain?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, all of the matters raised by these questions from hon. Members have been addressed in public by the Government in various statements and interviews, except in respect of Question 631, which is not a question that it is possible to answer.

I expect to provide a fuller update to the House on Monday during the course of my Budget address.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I will ask him for an update in relation to the treaty questions which are mine, which are Questions 648 to 651, if I may, and I will try to specify, as I do, which question I am asking in relation to, but my first question is general in relation to the talks themselves and issues being raised in the talks.

Yesterday there was an incident in relation to attempted boarding of fishing vessels in Gibraltar waters. I am sure the Chief Minister will agree with me that it is unacceptable that Spanish Guardia Civil vessels should attempt to board people who are conducting marine leisure activities within Gibraltar waters peaceably. Will he be raising those issues in the context of the talks that are ongoing with Spain, to try to find resolution so that these things do not happen again?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is very important that we do not mix unacceptable actions of the sort that we saw yesterday with the negotiation that we have on foot between the United Kingdom and the European Union. What we saw yesterday was a further unacceptable incursion into the undoubtedly British waters around Gibraltar, which are set out clearly under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It is absolutely the Government's view that any action that is taken, whether executive or otherwise, in those waters by any law enforcement agency which is not a Gibraltar law enforcement agency is contrary to law. I have to commend those of HM Customs who attended with such alacrity and diligence to assist those who were peaceably enjoying our waters, fishing in keeping with our laws, which are strictly enforced and controlled to ensure that there is a short period for tuna fishing which has to be complied with.

Separately, the United Kingdom and the European Union are negotiating for a future relationship between Gibraltar and the EU. That is not the forum for these issues, although around that forum there are opportunities to discuss these issues and the hon. Gentleman can rest assured that the vehemence with which I express our views in this place is nothing compared to the vehemence with which I express my views in those ancillary discussions around the negotiation.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The Hon. Chief Minister knows he has our support on that issue in communicating a united view of this House in relation to those unacceptable matters. The reason that I raise it here now is because while I understand the broader picture of the negotiations with the EU/UK on the future relationship, in tandem with that and as threads that are under that umbrella, there have been MoUs in the past in relation to environmental issues and so on, and I would have thought that there would have been opportunities to address those issues within that.

In relation to the talks themselves, he says in his principal answer that matters have been addressed in public before, but I am giving him the opportunity at today's date to give us a bit more information about whether there are going to be any formal rounds of talks in the course of July, given that we do have a pending UK election next Thursday.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is impossible to say what is going to happen in the rest of July until the result of the UK general election is known and Ministers are appointed and diaries are provided for. There are opportunities for formal rounds, but it will not be possible to confirm formal rounds until the post-election period in the UK.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Equally, is that the position in relation to Question 648? Obviously we have had the European parliamentary elections, but is it also the position that because we are, at the moment, in a state of flux as to the visibility of the composition and appointment of posts

495 subsequent to the European election, is that the same, or is the Chief Minister's view that the
European parliamentary election results have no impact on the treaty talks themselves?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I believe they have less impact. Mrs von der Leyen was
yesterday confirmed as the President of the European Commission, and so, although there is a
500 ratification process involving the European Parliament, it is a fairly seamless continuation of her
role and, therefore, likely her team. Ms Kaja Kallas will be taking over from Sr Josep Borrell as the
High Representative of the European Union, that is to say its de facto Foreign Minister, and
Antonio Costa is likely to become the President of the European Council, so I think that is a more
settled process. In Europe, because we deal with officials, I think that is likely to be less of a
505 problem, but there has to be the UK side also, and that is why I was referring to the settling down
of the process in the UK as being more relevant.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In relation to Question 650, which is whether it is the Government's
objective to negotiate an enduring treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar, or one that will have
510 a four-year lifespan, we have heard different views from the Government. It seems to us that the
view expressed by the Chief Minister is that he is seeking to negotiate an enduring treaty, whereas
the view expressed by the Father of the House is that that is not possible, and that only a four-
year deal is possible. What is the position?

Hon. Chief Minister: The position is that those are not the positions, and that the Hon. Sir Joe
Bossano and I are entirely in agreement, as are all other hon. Members of this Government and
Cabinet. The hon. Gentleman is representing a caricature of the views that we have expressed. If
he cares to delve more carefully into the words that I have used and the words that Sir Joe Bossano
has used, they are carefully calibrated to send signals not to him, but beyond.
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Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Would the Hon. Chief Minister be able to answer
whether or not businesses would be required to pay tariffs for goods imported from the UK where
they were originally manufactured outside of the EU?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, as soon as we have a treaty, I will be able to go into
the details of what it provides.
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Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you for the abrupt answer, but given the proximity to a negotiated
outcome, 0.1% in kissing distance, something as basic as this ... I understand that nothing is across
530 the line until it is across the line, but surely something like this should be set in stone. Would the
Chief Minister be able to provide details on this and give businesses confidence in that regard?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not know whether I would give them confidence or
less confidence. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman wants me to go just into this detail or
535 other details. I do not know whether he thinks this is the thing that has been resolved, or he thinks
that other things have been resolved. I do not know whether he wants me to give him long
answers, which he and his colleagues then say are party political broadcasts, or whether he wants
me to give him short answers, which he will describe as abrupt. I will just refer him to my original
answer and tell him that that remains our position.
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Hon. C Sacarello: Well, Madam Speaker, it would it be useful if he could just answer the
question; but never mind, I will go to the next one. Will there be any issues with importing
medicines or any medical products from the UK?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am sure that he would like me to answer the question
in the way that in his mind he would think I am going to answer the question, but I am going to
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550 tell him the answer that is, first of all, true, and second, the answer that is in keeping with the best interests of Gibraltar in the context of this negotiation. The hon. Gentleman should know that I am not going to get into the detail of any of the aspects of the negotiation that we have had to date, because to do so is not in Gibraltar's interest. If he wants to continue to advocate for things that might be being put to us by others and which we are resisting, he should feel free to do so, but he would not be acting in the best interests of Gibraltar.

555 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I beg to differ. I think whether it is in the public interest or not is a question of opinion. I know that in the discussions on the Northern Ireland Protocol there was widespread negotiation and involvement of many stakeholders within society, in stark contrast to how things have been run in Gibraltar. I raise very serious questions on the medical issue. For example, the Northern Ireland Protocol raised issues on test batches of medicines, whether they were to be accepted in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland; also to do with access to medicines approved by the UK regulator, the MHRA, but not yet by the EU. Will that be 560 the case for Gibraltar? Will medicines in that interim phase be able to be imported locally?

565 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are consulting, very widely in fact, with the stakeholders who are relevant and the stakeholders who know something about what they are talking about, in particular in relation to medicines. He need have no concerns about that whatsoever.

The last time I checked, Northern Ireland is in the region of 1,500 miles north of Gibraltar. He should remember that the Government of Gibraltar is negotiating for Gibraltar. The Northern Ireland Protocol is completely different to the issues that we are discussing in relation to Gibraltar. 570 It may have some political similarities, but we have often remarked how different it is.

I am not going to get into the detail of the negotiation, and I am surprised that he is asking me with such granularity about particular aspects of the deal, because it would appear to me that the rest of the Members opposite have understood that it is not in the interest of Gibraltar for us to be going into aspects of the detail of one particular subject area or another, and yet he seems to have been briefed by someone to come here to ask, with great granularity, about a subject that is not the subject on which he is well known to hold any expertise. I would simply advise him to go back to whoever has prompted him to come here to ask these questions and to say that whether it is in relation to that or absolutely anything else, the Government considers, and I think most people in Gibraltar would agree, that we are unable at this stage safely to go into any detail about 575 any aspect of the negotiation. We have held that discipline now for almost three years. We are not about to break it.

580 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Chief Minister for his answer. I can certainly confirm that I have not been briefed by any third party whatsoever.

585 I shall move on to Question 631 now with my supplementaries, if I may. I am hearing time and again of companies holding off, awaiting a deal, companies that are not investing. That is anecdotal, of course, but there is actually empirical evidence as well, as new registrations are down. What are the Government's plans to attract investments in the event of a non negotiated outcome?

590 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, perhaps I should have realised that he had not been briefed by any third party given the tenor of his contribution before.

It is impossible to put any empirical evidence behind the question that the hon. Gentleman has asked, which is whether or not we can confirm that people are not investing in Gibraltar pending the outcome of the treaty, but I can certainly tell him that our analysis tells us that there are people who are staying in Gibraltar because there is a chance that we are going to have a treaty. 595

In the context of our plans in the event of a non negotiated outcome, I refer him to the documentation that has been distributed and the technical notices that have been distributed by

600 the Deputy Chief Minister. And in relation to our plans for the economy in the event of there being
non negotiated outcome, I refer him to the fact that only one party has a plan for what happens
in the event of no negotiated outcome. That is the parties that I lead together with the Deputy
Chief Minister. That plan is called the National Economic Plan and he can see it in our respective
manifestos.

605 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q632/2024

**£9 million state aid recovery transfer –
Identification of Consolidated Fund subhead and whether considered exceptional**

Clerk: Question 632. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, further to Question 481/2024, can the Government advise
to what precise head and subhead of the Consolidated Fund revenue was the £9 million state aid
610 recovery transfer recorded; and would the Government agree that this recovery is of an
exceptional nature?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

615 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the funds were transferred from the Deposit Account
EU Judgment 3010427 to the Consolidated Fund Revenue Head 1 Subhead 2 Income Taxes,
Company Tax. The nature of the ruling, in effect, requires it should be booked there. Additionally,
given the ruling, in effect, finds this is taxation that was due, it cannot be considered exceptional
in nature. This is, in effect, arrears of tax and must be accounted for in that way.

620 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his answer. He will be aware that in
the past there have been occasions for exceptional revenue which have been recorded separately
within the Consolidated Fund, so there is provision for that, but as regards the recurring nature of
this, would the Chief Minister agree that this is not by way of recurring revenue into the
625 Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, I do not agree. The reason I do not agree is, first of
all, that the hon. Gentleman knows that there is likely to be another slither, at least, if not another
almost larger amount that will come in another year, and the effect of the judgement was that, in
630 fact, we could see more of this revenue in the future. So, this is not in any way potentially just
exceptional. The other case that he is referring to related to a settlement between parties. This is
not a settlement; this was a judgment that found that tax had been due.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I may agree to disagree. Would the Chief Minister happen
635 to have in front of him the date on which the transfer occurred?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, I do not, Madam.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q633/2024
Import Duty –
Amount collected in May 2024

640 **Clerk:** Question 633. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the amount of Import Duty collected in May 2024?

645 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the Import Duty collected for May 2024 is £7,582,614.96.

650 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q634-36/2024
Gibraltar Development Corporation –
Companies owned and controlled by GDC and publication of list with Estimates Book;
details of GDC borrowing

Clerk: Question 634. The Hon. R M Clinton.

655 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, can the Government please provide a list of companies that the Gibraltar Development Corporation owns or controls as at 31st March 2024, including any subsidiaries?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

660 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 635 and 636.

Clerk: Question 635. The Hon. R M Clinton.

665 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Will the Government undertake to provide a chart of Gibraltar Development Corporation-owned companies with the published Estimates Book, in the same way as is presently done for government wholly owned companies?

Clerk: Question 636. The Hon. R M Clinton.

670 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can the Government advise the amount of borrowing by the Gibraltar Development Corporation as at 31st March 2024, including details as to lender, terms and interest rate?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

675 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Government will consider the request to extend the listing and charting of GDC-owned companies but will not undertake to do so. Further, the Government will continue the policy of the GSD in respect of disclosing the amount of borrowing of the GDC.

680 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, if I go back to Question 634, I do not think I have had an answer to that question in terms of providing a list of companies.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we will consider it, because when we provide the chart, we are, in effect, providing the list.

685 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, the first question is in relation to questions asked in this House, to which I see no reason why the Government cannot provide an answer now. And the second question to which Chief Minister alludes was by way of publication to the general public as and when the Estimates Book is published. Two separate issues. I cannot see why the
690 Government cannot provide the information I have requested in Question 634.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I have told him I am considering it. If he wants an answer now, the answer will be no. I think he is better off with the answer saying I am considering it, and if I consider it and come to the conclusion that I should do it, then he will have the list.

695 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I must confess I find that a rather unusual position for the Chief Minister to take. Can I ask him why he refuses to provide that information to the House?

Hon. Chief Minister: Because it is publicly available information, Madam Speaker, and he is asking me, in effect, to go and do it for him.

Hon. R M Clinton: I am sorry, Madam Speaker, I would not be asking for that information if it were publicly available. It is not publicly available, so could the Chief Minister please provide an answer as to why he cannot provide this House with that information as at 31st March 2024?

705 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the Register of Companies in Gibraltar shows where a company is controlled by the Gibraltar Development Corporation, and therefore it is publicly available information. If the hon. Gentleman wants me to provide a list, he can ask me. He has asked me to do it for him. I have told him that I am considering providing the list and the chart. I have
710 not yet been able to take all the advice I need in order to determine whether or not I am able to do it, but if he wants the answer today, it is no, because I am taking advice on whether it is the proper thing to do. He cannot point, as far as I know, to a list being published at any time between 1996 and 2011 in respect of these companies. So, it is not as if it is something that they used to do and we are not doing.

715 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am going to have to go back through *Hansard* because I vaguely recollect I have asked a similar question in the past and the Father of the House has quite happily given me the information, so I do not see what the reticence is of the Chief Minister to provide this. He knows full well that doing a search on 60,000 companies, or however many there
720 are, at Companies House is not what I would call publicly available information. So, I just take it that this is the Government's view and Chief Minister accepts, no doubt, that this is what he calls transparency.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has linked this to a chart. He said, 'Can I have the list and can I have a chart?' so I have said I am considering whether to provide the list and the chart. If he says that we have provided the list in the past, then what he is saying is that we are very transparent. If all that is happening is that I am not updating the list, that is why I am saying I am taking advice on it. I have not said no; I have said I am taking advice on providing this list and this chart. If the hon. Gentleman wants to persist and ask me again, he can do so, but
730 if he wants to talk about transparency, I will remind him that on our website there is more statistical information in relation to the spending of the Government of Gibraltar and what the

Government of Gibraltar does than has ever been published before; that our Estimates Book contains more information than has ever been published before, that it is almost double the size of the Estimates Book that hon. Members used to publish; that we give them more information in relation to government companies than has ever been published before; that on 1st April this year we have published every single company's balance sheet or accounts online, something which they never did. So, yes, I believe this is one of the most transparent governments in the world and the most transparent Government in the history of Gibraltar. They have spent 12 years trying to persuade the public of the opposite and having deployed a panoply of measures to try to defeat us at the last election, they did not, because people did not believe them. So, yes, this is our attitude to transparency: more transparent than ever, and continuing our commitment to transparency, and considering providing him the list and the chart – just considering. There are a few other things going on in Gibraltar, not just Mr Clinton's questions.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, the Opposition has not linked the question of the list with the question of the chart. They are separate questions, Questions 634 and 635. It is the hon. Member who has chosen to answer them together, but by answering together they still are not linked. They may be linked in his answer, but they are separate questions. Question 634, which does not mention a chart at all, simply asks the Government to provide a list of companies at 31st March 2024 that are owned or controlled by the GDC. As the hon. Member to my left says, we have asked for this information before at different dates, and the Hon. Father of the House has provided that information. We do not understand the difficulty. The alleged linkage to the chart under Question 635 is the hon. Member's own particular life jacket. The reality is there is no linkage and we do not understand who he is taking advice from. Why is it that he cannot come to this House and provide a specific list? And who is he taking advice from? Or is it simply that that is a mirage to reveal the lack of transparency that he shows this House?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, often Question Time in this House descends into exchanges which are unnecessary, in my view, because all that is going to happen is that I am going to refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago. I have told him I am considering the issue. I am seeking advice, in part, from Sir Joe, who I was not able to speak to in the preparation of answers for this particular Question Time because of other government business. I will not be drawn into what is a mirage, because if I am drawn into that, he might not like the things that I regard as a mirage. I will have much more to say about that during the course of the Budget debate and, no doubt, my reply, which will not be an attack on the Opposition; it will be an attack on the Opposition's ideas and their ideology, but not on them as individuals. *(Interjection)*

Madam Speaker: I am moving on to the next question. The Hon. Mr Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just moving on to a supplementary on Question 636, the Chief Minister referred to GDC policy; however, I fail to understand how that relates to advising the amount of borrowing by the GSLP at 31st March 2024. He is the Government at present. We are asking the question. Can he not give us an answer?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I completely disagree with that. I am not the Government. I am the Chief Minister of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. *L'Etat, ce n'est pas moi*, let's be very clear, even if hon. Members might see themselves in that way had they been elected.

As far as I understand it, this information has never been published before. That is why I am saying that as far as I can see, we are sticking to the position that was set out in that respect. So, again, I do not think that we are doing anything different.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, this is something which I find troublesome in this House, that the Government refers to matters which pre-date most of the Members of this House and it is very hard for us in Parliament to actually check that, but I can recall, when he says it has never been published before, that I have asked this question of the Father of the House in the past, and I believe he has given me an answer.

The Chief Minister hides behind these suggestions that it has never been done before: 'It is unprecedented. I need to take advice.' He is the Government today. What is the secrecy of explaining what the GDC borrowing is today? As far as I am concerned, it is a publicly owned corporation. This is the Parliament. We are entitled to scrutinise the Government on any matters in respect of government-owned and controlled entities. Why cannot he give us a simple answer?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, again, if he says that Sir Joe Bossano has provided this information before, and he says that we are not being transparent by not providing it, then he would at least accept that in the past, when he said that Sir Joe Bossano has not been transparent, he was wrong. I do not have any detail to suggest that this information has been provided before. If it has been provided before, it will be provided again. I have no difficulty with that, but if it has not been provided before, it will not have been provided for a reason. As I have told him, it has not been possible for me to check the answer to this question with Sir Joe, or indeed with others who I am taking advice from in respect of these matters. So, the hon. Member will understand that I am not going to shift from my position. It is the answer I have given.

Again, he has said that I am the Government. I am not the Government; I am the Chief Minister of the Government of Gibraltar, and these are the Ministers of the Government of Gibraltar. The Government is a separate thing, and hon. Members might do well to try to understand that theory.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure we completely understand his position, though, because the hon. Member to my left says it has been provided before by the Father of the House. He seems very reluctant. It is a very basic question. He is the Chief Minister of the Government today. We are asking what borrowing a government-owned company has made. My hon. colleague says it has been provided before. Is he suggesting, as the Chief Minister of the day, that he needs to seek permission of the Father of the House to give us an answer?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, that is not what I am suggesting, but you can see that, of course, that is where he would like to take the politics. I did not say I was just awaiting the views of Sir Joe Bossano; I told him that I was expecting the views of others, too. I am not going to disclose who I take advice on when I am preparing answers to questions. I have said it has been a particularly difficult period for the Government and our ability to prepare for questions. Hon. Members know what else is going on. The sport of them asking questions is not the only thing that is going on in Gibraltar, and so I refer hon. Members to the answer I gave them a few moments ago.

We are going to have a full debate next week on the finances of Gibraltar. No doubt they will make, unfortunately, the same points that we have heard them make before, but at least, Madam Speaker, it will be the first time you hear them, so they might pique someone's interest.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, we do not ask questions as a sport. We ask questions to seek information for the people of Gibraltar.

We have had this before, in other Question Times ahead of Budgets, where they say they will answer questions in the Budget and then they do not. This is an opportunity for him to provide a specific answer to a specific question. Why won't he do so today?

Hon. Chief Minister: For the reason I have already given him today, Madam Speaker. That is why I refer him today to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q637-40/2024

GEP Ltd –

Source of £117 million borrowing; reason for, terms of, and source of income for payment of interest re £70 million borrowing from GSB

Q641/2024

GCP Investments –

Reason for £5 million borrowing

Clerk: Question 637. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Let's see if he can answer this one, Madam Speaker.

840 Can the Government advise from whom GEP Ltd borrowed over £117 million as at 31st December 2022; and what are the borrowing terms?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Questions 638 to 641.

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Clerk: Question 638. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government explain why GEP Ltd has borrowed £70 million from the Gibraltar Savings Bank as at 31st March 2024?

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Clerk: Question 639. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise what are the terms of the £70 million monthly income debenture issued by GEP Ltd to the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

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Clerk: Question 640. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise what source of income does GEP Ltd have in order to pay interest on the £70 million of debentures to the Gibraltar Savings Bank?

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Clerk: Question 641. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise why GCP Investments has borrowed £5 million from the Gibraltar Savings Bank as at 31st March 2024, and on what terms?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the GSLP Liberal Government that I lead has published more information about government-owned companies than any other Government in the history of our nation. We have published that which the law requires that each company must file, so that, in relation to government companies, members of the public have access to the relevant information without having to pay a fee. It appears that Mr Clinton now wishes to interrogate the reasons why the board of directors of some of the companies have entered into relevant financial arrangements and the detailed terms of each of these arrangements. To enter into such discussion in the House would violate the doctrine of the separate legal personality of each company and would put the Government in breach of Speakers' rulings.

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The Government will provide the same answer in respect of any future questions posed in respect of any other financial arrangement of any other Government company.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, obviously I am going to receive the same kind of response from the Chief Minister on anything I ask, but may I remind the Chief Minister that he obviously already violated the sacrosanct legal personality of Gibraltar Properties Ltd when he told us in this House that the £80 million he had borrowed from the Gibraltar Savings Bank was going towards Hassan Centenary Terraces, so the Chief Minister has been inconsistent in his answers. And the very specific questions I have asked have nothing to do with the information that is available publicly. The information is not available publicly, otherwise I would not be asking for it.

I think it is particularly important, Madam Speaker, that he at least answers one question, of which I have several here. Why has GEP borrowed £70 million from the Savings Bank, and what is GEP doing with it? The last time I came across GEP – as the Minister for the Environment will know, as he was Minister for Education then – was when the contracts for the Bayside and Westside Schools were signed. So, what is GEP doing with £70 million?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Minister for the Environment is still the Minister for Education, and I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I do not come to this House for sport. I do not come to this House for the amusement of the Chief Minister. I come here, to his House, to ask questions, to hold the Government to account. The Government does not wish to be held to account. Is that what I tell the people of Gibraltar, that the Chief Minister, the Government, does not wish to answer questions, especially in respect of money they are using from their savings: £70 million for GEP; £5 million for GCP? Does the Government not think they have a duty to tell the people of Gibraltar what they are doing with their money, especially the Savings Bank money?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, when we tell the people of Gibraltar what we are doing with Savings Bank money, hon. Members issue press releases saying that we are being partisan by telling people what we are doing with Savings Bank money. When we say that we will not talk about what a government company is doing, they say that we will not talk about what Government is doing with their money. Well, that is different, because a government company is not the Government, and the Estimates Book sets out exactly what the Government is doing. When a government company takes the loan, what a government company does with the money is not something that the Government is answerable for in this House. That is what I have referred to various Speakers' rulings about.

Let's be very clear: it is not as if there are nefarious things going on, as hon. Members would like to pretend. There are policies in play here that the people of Gibraltar have elected us to put in place. That is to say, that Savings Bank money, as a result of a law that we changed and, if my memory does not fail me, they voted in favour of, is being used for development projects in Gibraltar. Some of those development projects are development projects being led by the Government of Gibraltar. The returns are paid to the Savings Bank and the Savings Bank depositors have their money secure.

The argument that we consistently have, usually between the Father of the House and Mr Clinton, is that it appears that Mr Clinton is happier if the Savings Bank takes £70 million and invests it in a company on the Stock Exchange in London, or New York, where you then lose the ability to see what is happening with that money, instead of investing it in a company managed by Gibraltar for investment in Gibraltar, which produces returns in Gibraltar and ensures development in Gibraltar. We have roundly disagreed with that – not this morning: we have roundly disagreed with that since 2012. We changed the law in this House; they supported it. We continued to have this debate, in exactly the same terms as Mr Clinton is putting it now, since 2011, at every successive general election. They have not prevailed in their view, so the hon. Gentleman will forgive me for doing that which I believe is fair, proper, honest and correct, which is to continue to discharge the functions of government in keeping with the mandate we have obtained to invest Savings Bank money in this way through government companies, but not then

to come here to give him a breakdown of what each company does, which is what we are told by former Speakers' rulings we do not have to do.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I naturally disagree with everything he just said.

935 If I can move to Question – (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) Yes, I will give way to the ...

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, I thought my hon. colleague had a supplementary on this before he moves to another question.

940 Is it really the position of the Chief Minister that he will not tell the people of Gibraltar what these companies are doing with this money, which is either money borrowed for a public purpose or from the Savings Bank? GEP borrows £70 million from the Savings Bank. GEP borrows £117 million at 31st December 2022. GCP borrows £5 million from the Savings Bank. Savers want to know what these public companies owned by the Government are doing with their money for public purposes. Is it really his position that he is going to construct this web and rely on other
945 things so as not to give people that information? Is it really his position that just because he is elected, he thinks that gives him the blanket of not answering questions on the use of money for public purposes?

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, that is not my position and it would not be. Of course, that is not what is happening, but the hon. Gentleman, no doubt in order to extract his
950 contribution for social media purposes later, wants to present it in that way. Far from it, what is happening is exactly what I have detailed, and what we are not going to do is to get into the detail of what the government companies are doing.

That has been a perennial area of disagreement between us since 2011. Hon. Members should
955 not pretend now that this is something new. In fact, if there is something new, it is that we have, quite unlike them, taken the additional step of publishing the accounts of each of the companies. We have given more transparency than ever before. The taxpayer – and I want to set up, here, the important difference between the taxpayer and the depositor in the Savings Bank – now knows exactly what are the government companies and exactly what the accounts of the
960 government companies show, and they are published on the Government's website. The depositor at the Savings Bank knows what the Savings Bank is investing in. They are told every month, and additionally, they get a letter from the Hon. the Father of the House in respect of what the Savings Bank is doing. In some instances, they can see that the Savings Bank is not just taking the money outside of Gibraltar to an investment in British Telecom on the FTSE 100 or another
965 company on the Nasdaq, which it does as well. We are not just giving money to a bank in the UK that then invests it as well. If you look at the investments of the Savings Bank, £x million may go to a bank in the UK. That bank in the UK then invests it in whatever it wants to invest it, so long as it gives us back the capital and the interest. Some money is also going to companies in Gibraltar, and some of those companies in Gibraltar are government companies. In that situation – and this is something that we have repeated ad nauseam in this House – one would have thought that the savers ... The Hon. Mr Azopardi says, 'The savers want to know what you are doing with their
970 money.' Well, they would want to know what Bank X in London – that is not in Gibraltar, that has £100 million of Savings Bank money – is doing with that money. It is £100 million. It is in London. They may be investing it in emerging economies, which may be, therefore, investments in things
975 happening in sub-Saharan Africa, which produce high returns but at high risk, and yet nobody says, 'I want to know what's happening there.'

When the money is put in a government company in Gibraltar, not in the Government – in other words, it is not money that comes from the Savings Bank to the Government; it goes to a government company that is an entity with its own board of directors – they are saying, 'There,
980 we must know what it is being used for. Although in the hands of X Bank in London, it could be used for any purpose that we are not aware of and be at greater risk, here in Gibraltar, where it is very likely an investment in infrastructure and land which has real underlying value, which has

therefore as close to zero risk as one might imagine, we want to go to town on why you will not tell us exactly what that company is doing with that money.’ In doing so, what hon. Members are demonstrating is that however much more transparency we give, they will want even more; that they will want to squirrel down to every single penny, but not in relation to savers and protecting them, because it has nothing to do with protecting savers, because they are not asking about the huge amount of money that is being invested by the Savings Bank outside of Gibraltar, and which could be, although it is not – this is just how you diversify a portfolio – being invested, in a small measure, in an emerging economy, in an activity that all of us might think is not an activity we might like to see our money invested in. They want to know what is happening with the money that is being invested here by a government company.

Government companies, whether we give more disclosure or less disclosure of what they are doing, are simply pursuing investment in Gibraltar in the things that we all think are the good things to invest in, in Gibraltar. The hon. Gentleman has just referred to investment in the risky, nefarious etc. construction of education facilities. Well, if that is what they were doing, good – no? – because, in the end, let us remind ourselves that investors in the Savings Bank have the copper-bottom guarantee that the taxpayer will ensure that their capital is protected and the Savings Bank will pay their interest. Is it that we prefer, now, as taxpayers, guarantors of the Savings Bank, that the money that we guarantee and have to pay interest on goes principally outside of Gibraltar to a third party bank that could invest it in whatever, and might lose it – not going to happen, because this is how you diversify a portfolio – or that it go here, where it is ultimately also in our control and therefore is not at risk of being lost? I wager, although betting is not something that politicians should be involved in, as we can all see from the newspapers and television screens, that actually most savers would think, ‘Frankly, I am very comfortable that the money is being used by a government company in Gibraltar for infrastructure purposes etc. in keeping with the change in the law that was brought to the House by the Father of the House some years ago, which the GSD supported, which was that Savings Bank money could be invested in development in Gibraltar.’

And so this, Madam Speaker – I am sorry to explain in such detail – is a fault line that there has been between us and the Opposition since 2012-13, and it is unfortunate that because it is a fault line, which I fully respect, we should have to explore it at every session of the House. It is a fault line. We take it to the people. The people decide that they want us to continue to make the investments that we are making, to manage the Savings Bank like we are managing it, producing a Savings Bank reserve which is close on £80 million a year, when we inherited a Savings Bank reserve which was £1,114 from them. You could blame the taxpayer for wanting to continue to make that decision going forward ad infinitum, and always making sure that there is a GSLP Liberal Government looking after Savings Bank money in this way.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister has not explained that in such detail; he has explained it in such waffle, lacking in detail. He is right that there is ... it is not a fault line, it is a chasm between us. The problem is that there are Ministers of the Crown making these decisions all the way down the chain. When the Savings Bank makes the decision to borrow to lend money to a particular government-owned company, a Minister of the Crown has authorised the Savings Bank to do so, as part, presumably of the National Economic Plan. When that money is then used for public purposes for a taxpayers’ project, it is used because a Minister of the Crown has taken the decision for a public purpose. We are asking a simple question as to why £250 million has been used by public companies for public purposes. If there are particular projects, let the Government say so. We are not asking the cost of the box of nails. We are asking what project is being constructed or used or invested in by GEP with £117 million or £70 million, or £5 million by GCP. They are in a position to do so if Ministers of the Crown have taken those decisions all through the chain. Will he not do so one more time?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, this is the point that I want to make to the hon. Gentleman: that he does not need to raise his blood pressure to ask the question. The vehemence is not going to change my mind.

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There is a certain logic here. Every time I take time to explain things in detail, I am told I am waffling. When I am asked for questions which have a yes or no answer and I provide a yes or no answer, I am told I am being abrupt. One could think that Government Ministers are, in effect, the only ones who are determined to be guilty until somebody, every four years, determines that actually we were innocent of every offence that hon. Members want to put to us. I am neither waffling nor being abrupt. I am explaining the position of why we have the difference of opinion that we have now.

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The hon. Gentleman insists on his view, we insist on ours. We have successfully defended ours at four successive general elections, and the only thing that he can show for himself is having four general election losses when he has led a party to try to get people's confidence to do this job. So, he will forgive me for referring him to that and saying that we think that there are more people who believe that we are doing the right thing and not them.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

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Hon. R M Clinton: I have a supplementary, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: The last supplementary on this. It is time to move on.

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Hon. R M Clinton: [*Inaudible*] ... I was going to ask, Madam Speaker. I do not wish to go into preamble, but I would just say one thing, and that is that every penny that a government company borrows from the Savings Bank is, in effect, disguised borrowing, and I will add that to the list of indirect borrowing.

May I ask the Chief Minister: if he thinks these are such wonderful investments and that GEP, having borrowed £70 million, is making a wonderful investment, could he explain to the House how GEP is going to generate money to pay the interest on the debentures it has issued?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's preamble, properly allowed by you, in my view, relates to his view that this is indirect borrowing. He may take that view. I do not think it is legitimate, but that does not make it illegitimate. I fully accept that that is how he has set out to structure his understanding of public finances in Gibraltar in our time in office. It is not a view that is widely shared, and it is not a view that has led them to any political success.

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In the context of how GEP is going to generate the income necessary to fund this borrowing, that, of course, is a question for the board of GEP.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q642/2024
16 South Walk –
Details of tender

Clerk: Question 642. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Has the tender for the sale of 16 South Walk, Europa Walks Estate been granted; and, if so, to whom and at what price?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1080 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the tender for the sale of 16 South Walk has not been awarded. The highest bidder was not able to complete on the sale. The Government has retained ownership.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does the Government intend to put this property back on the market or offer it to tender again? Is that the Government's intention; and, if so, when?

1085 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I believe that it is our intention to put it out to tender again, but we cannot yet commit to when.

Hon. D J Bossino: Why?

1090 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there are a number of different factors. There are a number of properties in that area which are still able to come out to tender. We have a number of them which are rented and have continued in rent. As we rent them, capital value increases and we await the advice of land property agents when they become untenanted as to whether to rent them or to put them out to tender and see whether we get the price that Land Property Services advises us we should be getting, or not.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is this one that is being rented?

1100 **Hon. Chief Minister:** It is now, Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: Without revealing names, can he provide information as to whom?

Hon. Chief Minister: Not without revealing names.

1105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it an office holder of the Government?

Hon. Chief Minister: As has been the case in the past, and in particular is the case in respect of others in that area, this is a Crown officer.

1110 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Why isn't he able to reveal who it is?

1115 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because I do not think we talk about rentals. We do not even talk about tenderers. In other words, if the person had bought it, I would not give him the name of the person who had bought it. And we do still have data protection issues etc., even in relation to officers of the Crown.

Hon. D J Bossino: Has he taken advice in relation to that point? As I understand it, when tenders are awarded, they are made public. That has certainly been my experience in the past.

1120 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, but we do not tend to share the information across the floor of the House. We tend to publish it.

1125 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If, as the Chief Minister says, he tends to publish it, why can't he, in a public way, share this information across the floor of the House? I simply do not understand the distinction being made.

Hon. Chief Minister: Because this one has not been sold, Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: Why is there a distinction being made between selling and renting?

1130 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Because they are two entirely different concepts.

Hon. D J Bossino: In what way does the fact that they are two entirely different matters, as he puts it, influence whether he shares that information across the floor of the House?

1135 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because we do not share the rent roll of the Government of Gibraltar. I do not give him the name of the tenant of any government property, whether it is at the Walks or Varyl Begg.

Hon. D J Bossino: What is the reason for that?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, first of all, I understand it is parliamentary convention which predates data protection, but I would have thought that today, in particular, data protection.

1145 Let's be very clear – shall we try to cut through the up and down? – he knows exactly what has happened with this property. He is trying to get me to say it across the floor of the House. I am not going to say it across the floor of the House, because parliamentary convention and data protection prevent me from saying so, but I wonder why he is insisting in trying to do that.

1150 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I ask a question, he does not. Is the decision which the Government is making in relation to retendering determined by how long the current occupants will remain in the property? In other words, is there going to be a point in time when the Government may ask the tenant to leave the property so that they can tender it and put it out into the open market?

1155 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, my question was rhetorical. I have successfully been chosen on four occasions to be the one who answers the questions, not ask them. It may be is the answer to his question.

Hon. D J Bossino: I did not catch the answer.

1160 **Madam Speaker:** It may be.
The Hon. Mr Reyes.

1165 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. If I am not mistaken, I think 16 South Walk is actually a three-bedroom property. Is the Chief Minister able to confirm that whoever is the tenant now has a family composition that entitles them to a three-bedroom property? Or is their family composition slightly smaller, and therefore they have ended up with spare rooms?

Hon. Chief Minister: This is not housing stock, Madam Speaker.

1170 **Madam Speaker:** None of us caught the answer.

Hon. Chief Minister: I said this is not housing stock.

Madam Speaker: This is not housing stock.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I plead my total ignorance. Can the Chief Minister explain? If it is not housing stock and it is being rented out as a house, can he enlighten those of us who are not acquainted with the system as to what he means by 'it is not housing stock'?

1180 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That the housing allocation criteria do not apply, Madam Speaker.

Hon. D J Bossino: What applies in relation to these properties? In what way is this particular estate differentiated from the criteria which apply, as he puts it, to the housing stock?

1185 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in the way that we inherited from them, that they had areas which they received from the MoD where they had permitted tenancies to be created not in keeping with the housing allocation criteria that was not housing, but for other purposes involving senior officers of the Crown, and on that basis we were advised that in certain instances we should permit that in the context of this estate, like they permitted it in other estates which they took from the MoD.

1190 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it within the realms of possibility that there is going to be a sitting-tenant purchase by the current occupant?

1195 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I understand the tenant is not yet sitting, so I think it is unlikely.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q644/2024
Voting rights for over-16s –
Support for change in law

Clerk: Question 644. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1200

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, following the close of the consultation period on 31st December 2023, has Government taken a policy decision as to whether it will support a change in the law to enable persons over the age of 16 the right to vote in general elections and/or whether it will present a parliamentary motion for debate in this House?

1205

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, no decision has yet been taken. As the hon. Gentleman will know, this is a matter which the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform, of which he is a part, is considering and will be reporting to Parliament on. Our manifesto commitment was to consult on this issue, and a consultation paper was issued on 22nd November 2023, with all responses presented to the Select Committee.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I do recall that responses were given to the Select Committee, but I did not see it on the list of issues that we agreed with the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister. The Hon. Chief Minister is not a member of that Committee, but if what he is saying is that it is a matter that will now be referred to the Committee for consideration, we will await that consideration by the Select Committee.

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Does he, then, mean that the Government has no position on it? Presumably it would have to communicate a position in the Select Committee? And if so, what is the Government's in-principle position having now closed the consultation period, if there is a position?

1220

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I have expressed a position in this House on the issue of voting at the age of 16 – I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is just not aware of it, because he did not follow the proceedings of this House as assiduously he does now that he is a Member of it – and our manifesto is, in my view, relatively clear in expressing our views, but it will be

1225

something for the Select Committee, where we will express our view, where we will give effect to the thing that we say in one sentence of our manifesto:

This proposal aligns us with numerous progressive democracies around the world, where young people aged 16 and above have been granted the right to vote. Lowering the voting age recognises the maturity and political engagement of our youth. It empowers them to actively participate in shaping the future of our nation, ensuring that their voices are heard, and their concerns addressed.

1230 I think it is pretty clear what our views are, but we also believe, because it is about affecting the franchise, that we should listen to the views of others. Too often, we obviously are concerned, rightly so, to hear the views of those in their 60s, 70s and 80s. Why shouldn't we be also listening to the views of those age 16? Those of us in our 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s are heading in one particular direction, and those in their teens are heading in the direction of becoming economically active and making the decisions in the future.

1235 I am very clear. I think 16-year-olds should vote. That is my position. I have expressed it before in this House. The GSLP and Liberal parties went with a manifesto for government which set the position out very clearly. We have consulted and we will be taking the position to the Select Committee. We will see what the Select Committee advises.

1240 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q645/2024

**Gibraltarian Status Act section 9 applications –
Number rejected in last 10 years**

Clerk: Question 645. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1245 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, how many applications have been received under section 9 of the Gibraltarian Status Act in the last 10 calendar years and been rejected, broken down by calendar year?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1250 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the number of applications received under section 9 of the Gibraltarian Status Act in the last 10 calendar years which have been rejected, broken down by year, is as follows: 2014, 18; 2015, 27; 2016, 22; 2017, 7; 2018, 8; 2019, 1; 2020, 3; 2021, 15; 2022, 19; 2023, 5; 2024, 3.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q646/2024

**Victoria Keys –
Agreements re financing arrangements**

1255 **Clerk:** Question 646. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, has the Government entered into any contractual agreement or licence agreement or development licence or development lease or agreement in

1260 relation to the financing arrangements of the reclamation or development of the Victoria Keys site; and, if so, with whom and what are the main terms of each agreement?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1265 **Chief Minister (Hon. F. R. Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government has not yet signed agreements with Victoria Keys developers.

1270 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can the Hon. Chief Minister give us an update of where things lie? I ask this question periodically and he has answered not yet in relation to a number of possibilities that I posed in my question: contracts or licences or development licences or development leases or financial arrangements. I am assuming, therefore, that no agreements have been reached on any of those issues, but can he please update the House on the negotiations and the issues that are a hurdle to reaching agreement?

1275 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am afraid that there is too much in contention at the moment for me to be able to set out what those issues are. There are too many different options that are live, and I do not want to prejudice the taxpayers' position by setting anything out in public.

1280 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask this, perhaps: has the size of the plot in any way been changed as was originally envisaged in 2019 when this was announced with some fanfare, because obviously the reclamation continues at pace, and so is it the position that they are seeking still to reclaim, while these negotiations are ongoing, a plot of land which potentially will be of the same size as that envisaged in 2019?

1285 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, I think it is going to be larger.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can the Hon. Chief Minister help us with how much larger it will be?

1290 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because it is not fixed.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I did not hear that. It is not fixed, I think he said. Is that right?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes.

1295 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And that would be fixed in the negotiations, or by government policy irrespective of whether negotiations come to a conclusion or not?

Hon. Chief Minister: Government policy and the DPC.

1300 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And finally, is there a time limit in the Government's mind as to when these negotiations should conclude, or not, or are they still content to continue negotiating with the same parties without considering the possibility of tendering a potential site out?

1305 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there is nothing to tender. There is seawater. I do not think that the history of Gibraltar has ever seen a tender of water. We tend to put out tenders of land, not tenders of water.

1310 What we have done – and I explained this at some length before – is look at the possibility of doing a deal for a third party to reclaim land but for the Government, and that then, at the end of that, the deal might involve that they might keep a part of that land, but the land is created for the Government. We do not tender that they should be able to create that further land.

I think in their time there might have been one or two situations where land was created, but it did not arise from tender. As far as I understood, it arose from private treaty between parties and permission being granted by the Government to reclaim, but even then the reclamation creates land which has to be put in a lease. So, no, we do not believe that there is a likelihood of tendering out for this, although we are negotiating to see how we can create that land, more land perhaps than was originally envisaged.

What I have learnt in the context of my professional practice, and indeed my political work in the past 12 years, is that you would be foolish to set up a cliff of time by which you have to do something in the context of a negotiation, unless it is in your interest to do so, to bring about an end to the negotiation or to up a benefit. In this context and in the context of other negotiations that I am involved in, I think setting up a time by which things have to be done is not in our interest. It can be contrary to the interests of the taxpayer. That is why I have not done it. I have said that before to the hon. Gentleman when he has asked this question periodically, and it remains my position, although people can see that a lot of area has already been reclaimed in front of Coaling Island, which is the area where part of the Victoria Keys development will be.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: The reason I asked whether there was a limit on the tender ... I hear what the hon. Member says, but surely the expressions of interest process in relation to the Eastside was in the nature of an invitation to submit bids for things that were partly water at that stage – you have to chuck some of that land, the rubble mountain, into the sea to create the site – so I did not think I was creating some precedent with my question.

I note what he says, but it has been five years already since they announced this project, and it was centre spread in their 2019 manifesto. Does he not think that the moment will come, sooner rather than later, that the Government needs to take a policy decision in relation to that land that is being created, because, as he says, as a matter of government policy, they are creating a plot of potential land – well, actual land when you see the reclamation – that is growing in size, may even be larger than the large plot of land that was announced in 2019? Isn't it in the taxpayers' interest to do something with that land?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I disagree with him as to what has happened on the Eastside. The tender for the Eastside, and indeed the contract that was subsequently done, related to the plot of land that was there and the coastal protection works that were required, not reclamation, although using the rubble mountain, as people call it, to create more land, is part of what was agreed in the negotiation. But the tender, from memory, was for the coastal protection works which were required to protect the reclamation as it was. In the context of that negotiation, we agreed that we would take more premium because we agreed that in the context of the area of coastal protection agreed, we were agnostic as to whether more land was created, so long as we had a formula in respect of premium and we had some marina elements which did what we needed done. So, it is not quite the same. And here is the rub. When you are acting for the Government of Gibraltar and you are acting for the taxpayer, you have to always ensure that you are doing the best in the long-term interest of the taxpayer. Of course, it is in my short-term interest and my colleagues' short-term interest in government that we should quickly do a deal in relation to that land and that people should quickly see it being developed. I can quickly point to the fact that the centre spread in our 2019 manifesto has become what is there, and I can say, 'Another promise fulfilled.' Of course, given the sort of thing that the hon. Gentleman is saying, you would say, 'It is very much in your personal interest that you should do that because you blunt his ability to attack you on that basis.' But that is not what we are interested in doing on this side of the House. On this side of the House, we are interested in ensuring that we grow Gibraltar in the best possible way, that we use the taxpayers' assets in the best possible way, and if that means that things need to take longer and we cannot have a development to point to our manifesto and show that we have completed that project in that time but it means that we get a better deal, long term, for the taxpayer, that is a very good thing – and in any event, every day that passes,

1365 the land is going up in value. It is not as if, if we do not follow the Hon. the Leader of the
Opposition's advice, we will not have a buyer for the land and they might pay less. Each day that
passes, that asset is going to be worth more. So, he will forgive me for also disagreeing with the
second part of his question and telling him that I think actually we are doing the right thing in the
way that we are managing the negotiations in relation to Victoria Keys, that we have been right
from the get-go, and we have been right, in particular, not to pay any heed to the approach that
he was suggesting we should take.

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Madam Speaker: Is that the end of the questions, or do you have another one?

Questions for Written Answer

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

1375 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the answers to
Written Questions W75/2024 to W82/2024 inclusive.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I now have the honour to move that the
House should now adjourn to Monday, 1st July, at 10.30 in the morning, when it is my intention
to move the First and Second Readings of the Appropriation Bill 2024-25.

1380 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to
Monday, 1st July at 10.30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Monday, 1st July at
10.30 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Monday, 1st July at 10.30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 12.20 p.m.

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 10.30 a.m. – 12.35 p.m.

Gibraltar, Monday, 1st July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 10.30 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Procedural – Removal of jackets

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Monday, 1st July 2024. Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: With the Hon. the Chief Minister's indulgence, very quickly, I am cognisant
5 that there may be different views on this, and at the risk of upsetting both sides of the House in
one fell swoop, I would like to address the issue of jackets.

I am aware that in June 1996, Speaker Alcantara, as he then was, made a ruling that any
Member who suffered from heat could remove their jackets during the long, hot summer without
air conditioning. It is clear that permission to remove jackets was premised on an avoidance of
10 subjecting a Member to heat sufferance. Happily, we have the benefit of very effective air
conditioning in 2024, so the reference to hot and suffering from heat has become somewhat
otiose. In the circumstances, I would ask that hon. Members do not remove their jackets whilst in
session.

Thank you.

Order of the Day

BILLS

FIRST AND SECOND READING

Appropriation Bill 2024 — First Reading approved

15 **Clerk:** The Order of the Day. (ix) Bills – First and Second Reading.

A Bill for an Act to appropriate sums of money to the service of the year ending on the 31st day
of March 2025. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that a Bill for
20 an Act to appropriate sums of money to the service of the year ending on the 31st day of
March 2025 be read a first time.

Madam Speaker: I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to appropriate sums of money to the service of the year ending on the 31st day of March 2025 be read a first time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Clerk: The Appropriation Act 2024.

**Appropriation Bill 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate commenced**

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the distinct honour to move that the Bill now be read a second time.

This is my 21st Budget address as a Member of this Parliament. I hope the Father of the House finally thinks that I am coming of age in some way. It is my 13th Budget address as Chief Minister. Perhaps there is truth to the saying that 13 is lucky for some. I suppose those who have fought so hard and so dirty to stop me delivering this address may think themselves unlucky that I am here to deliver it. I am, in fact, acutely conscious of the honour that it is to be able to get up to deliver this address in presenting the Second Reading of this Bill for the 13th successive time, not least because only two previous Chief Ministers in our history have had the pleasure and honour of presenting as many successive Budget addresses. Indeed, Gibraltar went to the polls last autumn and made the conscious democratic decision to return us to this side of the House, and so, in moving this Second Reading, I therefore value and appreciate the huge and singular honour that it is to present these Estimates of Government's Revenue and Expenditure for the year ending 31st March 2025, the current financial year. I will also spend some time presenting to the House the outturn for government revenue and expenditure for the year ended 31st March 2024, the last financial year, which was the 12th full financial year of a Socialist Liberal Government since our first Budget in 2012-13, when we started the work of delivering the many policies, projects and changes which have positively transformed our nation for the better.

In that time, we have also dealt with the many challenges that have arisen. From tankers loaded with Iranian oil in breach of EU sanctions which had to be arrested in our British waters, to respiratory pandemics, social and economic shutdowns, a carousel of Prime Ministers and Foreign Secretaries in the United Kingdom and the death of our beloved former monarch, we have faced it all. Add to that the vicious continuing invasion of a European territory by Russia, in breach of the post-war border pact agreed by the Helsinki Accords, which gave rise to a worldwide cost-of-living increase without precedent that pushed inflation to double digits, and you have a challenging in-tray by any standards. But do not forget, of course, the effect of the 2022 mini-Budget, which is not perhaps the choicest way to describe the collection of Truss and Kwarteng ideas that gave rise to the steepest post-war increase in UK interest rates.

If that were not considered to be a mountain to lead us through, then certainly it is all made harder, if not impossibly hard, by having to do all that whilst navigating first our departure from the EU, and then the calibration of our new relationship with the EU. It is not lost on me that we are now in the eighth year post the Brexit referendum. Believe it or not, we only had the benefit of our first term in the EU. From the second of our four successive terms, we have been dealing with Brexit, and so in this State of the Nation address I will, of course, have to reflect on the ongoing negotiation for a treaty on our future relationship with the European Union and all that it implies. I will have to reflect, for hon. Members, how these matters impact these numbers that we are considering in this Bill and the appropriation we are asking the Parliament for, in order to fund public services in Gibraltar, and indeed the outturn figures that we are considering for last year.

Madam Speaker, because so many Members on both sides of the House are here for the first time to participate in this debate on this Bill, I want to spend a little time setting out how this debate has historically developed. It is important that the traditions of this set-piece political moment are understood by all who are here and who may be watching.

We call this a State of the Nation address for a number of reasons. The first is that the numbers we are debating go to the root of what we do as a nation. This is the ultimate follow-the-money principle. Following the money in this debate shows you what the nation is doing and is capable of doing as much as what the nation is not capable of doing. We have had this tradition since this debate first became more outwardly political in the late 1980s when the Father of the House delivered his first Budget address. Until then, under the old 1969 Constitution, the Budget was delivered by the Financial Secretary, who was appointed by London. He also had a seat in this House and would present, in effect, the Budget that the United Kingdom was prepared to allow him to present. All that changed after 1988 when, famously, the then Financial Secretary simply presented the Bill by reading the long title and then said that he was handing over to a new 'Buana', who happened to be Sir Joe Bossano.

In that first Budget address by a Chief Minister, Sir Joe set out certain touchstones, at least for us on this side of the House, which have remained fundamental. The first, of course, is the golden rule, which variously members of the party opposite have pledged allegiance to and ignored in equal measure. I will go into more detail in respect of what that rule means later. The second, no less important principle is that the key assets of our small nation are our land and our people. Those are the principles that have really been the axis of this debate in this House since then; each year's fortunes adapted to the differing views of the state of the nation and its finances. Of course, after 2006, the Financial Secretary and the Attorney General have disappeared from this House's ex officio members. Now it is, rightly, legally the Chief Minister who moves the Bill for the appropriation. All that, we owe to the Father of the House when he was uncharacteristically termed 'Buana' by the then UK appointee at the time. Buana has just arrived, Madam Speaker.

With that background set out, I turn now to the more purely economic aspects of my presentation of the schedules to the Bill and the underlying estimates which are in the Budget Book. I reassure the community that having once again secured the confidence to govern, we will continue to act in this debate as we have in the past, keeping as our watchwords the twin principles of responsibility and prudence, because although we finally see the receding tide of high inflation, we must continue to factor into our calculations the fact that interest rates are still high, though falling, and that we continue in negotiations for a post-Brexit treaty but we have not yet reached a positive or negative conclusion.

And so, these Estimates seek to provide a prudent spending plan for the financial year, without failing to ensure that we continue to navigate these waters without creating future public finance issues for our children, because that is the key here, as it has been the key in every aspect of our previous Budgets. We must follow the golden rule on recurrent expenditure, so that day-to-day spending that we are paying for today is funded from the day-to-day revenue that we are receiving today, and the borrowing that we do is limited to the borrowing necessary to fund the multi-generational projects or problems that we are developing, funding or dealing with.

Let me give the House and the wider Gibraltarian public a flavour of what we will borrow for and what we will not borrow for. We will not borrow to fund pay increases for public sector workers or for anyone else. Why? Because we must be able to afford the cost of the public sector from the income that we have today. I will not ask my children to fund my income today by paying for that borrowing when they are older. That would not be fair, but it would be fair to borrow to fund schools, a power station, new health facilities, things that will last for 50 years, and to fund the cost of a once-in-100-year pandemic, because our children will have the benefit of those assets and that pandemic cost for themselves and the benefit of their children.

That structure is the one we are following in taking the steps we take today to act with a view to protecting the integrity of the nation's public finances today as much as for our children in the future, because every good Budget is as much a Budget for the short as it is for the medium and

120 long term, with measures for today, for tomorrow and for years to come. That has been the key
driver in our work in establishing these estimates: long-term planning for a better economic
outlook to come. That is what we are able to aim for now, having restored financial stability at the
end of our third term after the enormous challenge that COVID presented to our public finances;
125 doing so to ensure that a potential no-negotiated outcome, should it come, does not once again
knock us for six and undo that financial stability. I think it is important to give the House and the
nation as much of an update as possible, therefore, in respect of the current state of the
negotiations, and I will do that now.

As I recently announced, I travelled to Brussels on 20th June and was able to have a first-hand
briefing from those involved in the most recent technical negotiations immediately after the
completion of the last full technical meeting. As a result, I am able to confirm to the House that
130 the Government remains optimistic about the opportunity to do a treaty between the United
Kingdom and the European Union on Gibraltar's future relationship with the EU. I believe that the
negotiations are likely to come to a successful conclusion in coming months. Of course, the result
of the British general election later this week will impact the timetable of the next high-level
ministerial meeting. I nevertheless believe that this will happen very soon and it will be possible
135 to deal with all issues that concern all of the relevant parties. As all in Gibraltar know, the most
relevant parties are likely to be Spain and Gibraltar. Despite that, there are, of course, equities
which affect the United Kingdom and the EU directly, and therefore this is very much a negotiation
which has four entities involved that are very concerned to ensure that all their respective equities
are properly and fully provided for if the result is to be successful for one and all four. That can
140 only happen if in reaching that conclusion we are successful in not crossing each other's red lines.

As has already been referred to earlier in the session, there have been statements made in
Spain, and indeed in the United Kingdom, which have greatly concerned people in Gibraltar. This
has been particularly concerning for people insofar as it has related to the potential for the
presence of uniformed and armed Spanish law enforcement officials in different parts of our
145 geography. Our position in that respect and the position of the United Kingdom has been spelt
out clearly from the beginning of the negotiation. It has not changed. I can confirm to the House
and to the whole community that our position will not change, but we are equally clear that
responsibility for Schengen checks rests with Schengen states and authorities, in the same way as
responsibility for Gibraltar checks on immigration rests with Gibraltar. There are many ways to
150 skin a cat, and we are working to ensure that, in this context, the skinning does not get close to
the bone on the issue that matters to us all.

There are, of course, commercial issues involving access to the single market in goods also, and
the new relationship with the single market that we will have, that will be designed to enable us
to have full fluidity at the Frontier. Contrary to what has been suggested during the course of this
155 session, we have consulted very widely indeed with stakeholders in the retail and wholesale
industries and their representatives. We have been negotiating against the feedback we have had
from them and the data that we have from HM Customs Gibraltar, who have been a hugely
important part of how we have handled this negotiation.

I therefore wish to reiterate that I am very clear – my negotiating team is very clear, my Cabinet
160 is very clear, my Government is very clear, my party is very clear – that we will only bring back a
deal if it is safe and secure. It has to be safe in respect of the sovereignty of all of Gibraltar
remaining 100% British. It has to be secure in ensuring that jurisdiction and control are not in any
way compromised, negatively affected, or somehow lost. And of course, the deal has to be
beneficial, because our businesses need to be able not just to do as well as they are doing now;
165 they need to be able to thrive, they need to be able to grow. They will be the engines of the joint
prosperity of which we have spoken so often in the political rhetoric of presentation of these new
arrangements, should they come to fruition. So, I want to give confidence, both in saying that we
remain on the cusp of being able to finalise arrangements, but also in saying that we will walk
away from arrangements which are not safe, secure and beneficial, and which might somehow
170 prejudice exclusive British sovereignty over Gibraltar.

I said in January, in the course of my address at New Year, that it was important that as we came towards the end of the negotiations, we should demonstrate patience and stoic calm, because that would be the moment of greatest pressure. I think those watching these negotiations in our community will have seen for themselves how that pressure has manifested itself recently
175 in some public statements, and they will have seen also that while others might have buckled or turned, we have not buckled. We will not be turned. We are very clear in wanting to do a deal but in being prepared not to do a deal if it is not the right deal for Gibraltar. But I do believe we will get the right deal for Gibraltar. I do believe we will get there, even if it means we have had to take longer in negotiation than any of us wanted or expected, but that is the price of doing the right
180 deal.

That is as much as I can say now in respect of the negotiations. I know the Deputy Chief Minister will be addressing matters related to the preparations being made for no negotiated outcome in his address, because to do the right deal we must be ready not to do a deal. That is the prudent way to negotiate.

To continue to enjoy financial stability, we must also ensure that whatever the outcome of the treaty talks, we continue to properly manage our debt. The largest portion of our debt is our COVID debt. I must remind hon. Members and inform those who were not here when it happened that we all agreed to take, in effect, £500 million, or half an American billion, of debt in order to pay for the costs of COVID. These costs were the costs of the GHA Health Service in that period,
185 the cost of paying all salaries in our economy of those who were locked down and all the other costs we analysed at length in this House. People might remember what we called the BEAT measures *et cetera* at the time, although most of us would like to forget. Previous debates have concentrated on the detail of how this sum is made up and accounted for by the COVID Fund, and I do not intend to go through all of that detail again today. It is available in *Hansard* already should
190 any hon. Member who was here then wish to refresh their memories or should anyone who was not here wish to fully inform themselves.

I also remind those who were here, and I inform those who were not, that this agreement was reflected in the work we did with Members opposite both inside and outside this House. Indeed, as I reminded the House last year and no doubt will again next, and every year that I am a Member
200 of this House, I will forever remember the Hon. Mr Clinton, in his capacity as the Shadow Minister for Public Finance, saying to the then Presiding Member the following words:

now is not the time for us to nit-pick as to is this prudent or is this the right thing to do at this stage. We need to do what is necessary and we will work out later on how we pay for what we need to do. This is something I thought I would never say, but it is true.

The date was Friday, 20th March 2020. Any hon. Member wishing to review that can see it at line 644 of the *Hansard* for that date. So, when we are talking about repaying the £500 million, we are talking about repayment of the extraordinary multi-generational COVID debt that we
205 incurred with the express support of the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Clinton, and indeed hon. Members opposite. That is important when we hear from hon. Members opposite when they talk about how high debt is. They agreed with our incurring the £500 million debt.

I want to reconfirm our commitment on this side of the House to stand by what we said repeatedly at that time and thereafter. We remain committed to the COVID debt being repaid as efficiently as possible and in a manner that provides as little drag as possible for future generations of Gibraltarians. I said this last year and I repeat it again today. I have already explained to the House in previous years the Government's strategy for the repayment of the fully crystallised amount of the COVID debt. That strategy was, from the beginning, to enter into a 25-year repayment plan which would be effective from December 2023, with what we call 'top cover' from
215 the UK government sovereign guarantee that I secured in negotiation with the UK government for that period. The effect of the UK government guarantee is to amortise the interest rate liability for the debt over that period. As I told the House last year, we had achieved agreement from

220 HM Treasury to the initial period of 25 years, but what we had not expected – in fact, no-one had
expected – was the massive increase in interest rates in the period after September 2022 and the
effect of the now-notorious Truss-Kwarteng mini-Budget, which had massive effects. That is why,
as I also told the House last year, we adjusted our strategy. We have ensured that we save the
Gibraltar taxpayer millions of pounds in interest rates over the next 25 years by not entering into
a long-term repayment plan last year when interest rates were at their highest. To have done so
would simply have seen Gibraltar enter into the highest interest rate for the remaining 25 years.
225 For that reason, with the full support of HM Treasury and our principal lender, RBSI/NatWest, we
extended the current facility on identical terms for a further short-term period of three years to
December 2026. That has now given us the freedom to fix the rate we will pay for the final 22 years
in a period when we expect – although our view was not shared by Members opposite – interest
rates will again be lower than they were last year. We will thereby deliver savings through the
230 benefit of these lower rates for taxpayers. I told the House last year that the documentation for
that extension was being reviewed and would be finalised within weeks, and I was subsequently
able to report to the House that it had been finalised and fully entered into on 17th November
2023. I had it laid on the table when signed on 18th July 2023, although it could not come into
effect until the guarantee had been through all of its parliamentary stages in the UK.

235 As I have often emphasised, especially when some prophets of doom stalk the television
studios, this place and social media, this facility, its extension and the UK Government’s sovereign
guarantee reflect not only the excellent work that has been done between HM Government of
Gibraltar and our banks, but also the faith that the banks have in us and our ability to deliver. They
fully analyse us, all of our assets and liabilities and our companies, and they are clear that we are
240 in a very, very good place when it comes to the overall debt we hold and our ability to finance it.

For all of those reasons, and as inflation recedes and interest rates are receding also, we are
once again being proved right in our management of key aspects of our public finances. We were
right to take the view that it was likely the markets would settle and interest rates lower over the
three-year period, and that we would therefore be in a better position to achieve the best long-
245 term interest rate deal for Gibraltar to repay the £500 million multi-generational COVID debt
facility. Additionally, as we have also said all along, the terms of this long-term facility include a
commitment from us to repay 10% of any budget surpluses towards the debt. This is something
we proposed to our lenders from day one, not an imposition on us. We see this as a way of
demonstrating our commitment to repayment of the facility and of the seriousness of our
250 borrowing covenant. Today, I can confirm that we will be delivering on that commitment and that
we will be making such a payment.

Madam Speaker, I want to reiterate the gratitude of the people of Gibraltar to the United
Kingdom Government and HM Treasury for their position in continuing to support Gibraltar on
our long-term repayment plan on the multi-generational COVID debt. I will never tire of reminding
255 the nation and the House that without this guarantee, agreed back in March 2020 by the Rt Hon.
Jesse Norman MP, who was then the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the £500 million facility
that we need to pull us through COVID would have been much more expensive. Indeed, after
October 2022, it would have become devilishly more expensive. We have been fortunate, and it
is a testament to the undoubted strength of our covenant, despite the notorious bad-mouthing
260 of it by Members opposite, to be the only Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom to enjoy the
benefit of a UK guarantee; going in without having one would have been really challenging when
seeking to organise lower interest rates. It really changes the melody of the negotiation with a UK
financial institution when you have the benefit of such a guarantee.

The extension of the guarantee for the further three-year period received parliamentary
265 approval in the UK shortly after our own Budget debate last year. It was confirmed on
14th November 2023. Once again, I record our sincere thanks to the UK Government, in particular
HMT and the SCDO, for their support in respect of this guarantee. It not only clearly reflects their
deep confidence in the relationship between the United Kingdom and Gibraltar; it also reflects,
perhaps more clearly than any other aspect of the relationship, the tangible pounds, shillings and

270 pence, how much we can rely on the United Kingdom when it matters. As I also told the House
last year, beyond those further three years to 2026, we have the benefit of a political commitment
from the UK government from the beginning to continue to work with us to assist by the provision
of the guarantee in respect of the remaining 22 years. I have no doubt that this commitment will
not change, even if the political colour of the government in London changes on Friday morning,
275 but of course, it is fair to say that it would be subject to the terms of the final facility for the
remaining 22 years being agreeable. It is important to also set out that the renewal again of the
guarantee will need to receive official, ministerial and parliamentary approval as necessary when
the facility is agreed. I repeat, as I told the House last year, that I see no reason whatsoever that
we will not, as we anticipated, have the facility and the guarantee for the full 25-year period to
280 enable us to fully amortise the repayment of the COVID debt that we had to acquire to deal with
the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, in contributing 10% of our surplus this year to the repayment of the capital
of the COVID debt, we do not shrink from observing the golden rule to which I have referred
repeatedly. This is the rule that Sir Joe Bossano set out in his first full Budget as Chief Minister. We
285 believe we must never spend more in any financial year than we collect. In short, and in terms
that new hon. Members will need to become familiar with for the time that they are in this House,
annual expenditure must never exceed annual revenue. We only allowed ourselves to break that
rule in the absolutely exceptional circumstances of the 24-month financial year from 2020 to 2022.
We have returned to that discipline to ensure that we do not burden our children tomorrow with
290 our spending today.

In last year's debate, I was able to show the House that we had gone from a post-COVID
estimated deficit for that year of £50 million to an actual deficit of closer to £15 million. We then
estimated we would end the financial year 2023-24, the last financial year, that ended on
31st March 2024, restoring a slim surplus. Our predictions were met with scepticism, not to say
295 cynicism, on the benches opposite. Indeed, when I said we would balance the books and have a
little something left over at the end, Members opposite spent the week in this place telling us we
would not be able to do so. When I said that we had re-established financial stability sooner than
most other nations on the planet, hon. Members opposite poured scorn on the Estimates
prepared by our hardworking officials in the Ministry of Finance. But we have done so, and
300 therefore I want to turn now to an analysis of the public finances of our nation as they stand.

This year, as I established in 2022, the Draft Estimates Book is once again published online on
the Government website. This will enable the public to follow this debate as they listen to the
proceedings of this House. Again, as I have done in previous years, therefore, I will refer to the
relevant pages of the Book so that those watching or listening who wish to do so can follow the
305 figures in the Estimates Book.

As we go through this debate, it is important to keep in the back of our minds that although
inflation is reaching its 2% target in Gibraltar, world events continue to be very volatile. Since the
last Budget, a second war has begun, this time in the Middle East, and that could at any time, once
again, have a massive repercussion on the price of fuel, which is what traditionally drives up
310 inflation. That international uncertainty must be coupled with a more national uncertainty which
surrounds the absence of a final agreement between the UK and the EU in relation to Gibraltar,
so we have, as always, but for differing reasons, taken an extremely prudent approach when it
comes to the preparation of our figures.

Our aim last year, the first full post-COVID financial year, was to aim to restore a surplus. We
315 prudently projected a very modest surplus for 2023-24 of £2.5 million. In fact, I am pleased to
report that the estimated outturn for 2023-24 is a surplus. Despite the naysayers, despite the
negativity from Members who were sitting opposite us last year, despite it all, we have returned
a surplus of £1.9 million. That is just half a million pounds less than predicted. Having a surplus
means, of course, that we managed to ensure that expenditure did not exceed revenue. We stuck
320 to the golden rule, and in an election year. As an aside, hon. Members should note that I say that
because the only year since the turn of the century when Gibraltar has fallen into a deficit, when

there has not been a worldwide respiratory pandemic requiring the shutting down of the economy and locking down of our people, was in the financial year 2007-08. Of course, in that year, it was Members opposite who were in power and their management of the public finances in an election year leaves a lot to be desired, as that year's figures showed. But we delivered our surplus in an election year. We delivered on our commitment to the golden rule. That is even though we increased expenditure by the grant of a non-consolidated public sector support payment, which cost in the region of £6.5 million last year. So we, in effect, paid for that £6.5 million and delivered a £2 million surplus.

Again, to be clear, I am not claiming credit for the surplus. I do not produce the cash. We all do in this economy by our contributions through taxation and other revenue to the Government. My responsibility here is just to announce it. In doing so, I thank everyone in our economy who has contributed through their hard work and their effort for the increased revenue that we have had. As I do every year, I thank every single controlling officer in the Departments and Ministries who has brought their Department, Agency and Authority in on target. I obviously thank all of my ministerial teams, those who were with me before the election, those who are still with me, and those who are new after October 2023 and have been responsible for half a year of revenue and expenditure.

This modest surplus does not mean we can now go on a spending spree. Far from it. This is only the start of the long-term recovery. There is still work to be done. We have to be ready for any treaty negotiation outcome. For us, financial year 2024-25 is a continuation of the recovery. We are now stable, but we are not fully recovered yet. This modest surplus would not have been possible if it were not for only disciplined spending. In fact, greater revenue to government coffers has been essential in reaching this modest surplus. That is the work of all of our entrepreneurs in the private sector, and indeed of every taxpayer.

To help all Members and the wider community understand the way that the surplus is reached, I am going to break down the numbers into more relevant analysis for those listening and watching to understand – but first I am going to protect myself against the coughing that seems to be spreading widely and be ready in case any of those numbers get stuck in my throat. The first thing I am going to analyse is the revenue aspect. This is the money coming into government coffers over the last financial year. Third-party revenue last year came in at £746 million. That is nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ billion of revenue. That is £13 million more than our projected revenue, which was £733 million. Again, this year, the year 2023-24, which ended on 31st March, that is a historic record high revenue. I am able once again to boast today that the GSLP Liberal Government has achieved the highest revenue in the history of our public finances, another record Socialist Liberal year. This shows that after the strong recovery in financial year 2022-23, Government revenue streams have maintained a steady position for a second full financial year post-COVID in 2023-24, despite all the adverse effects of the continuing Ukraine war etc. Anybody who wants to understand this in the Book itself can go to page 5, the blue pages, and there you will be able to see, in the column Forecast Outturn, £746,321,000. The blue pages show the recurrent revenue.

Personal and Corporate Tax came in some £5 million in excess of our projections, up to just shy of £412 million from an estimate of £405 million. That is on page 6 of the Estimates Book. The figure is just £1.5 million shy in 2023-24 of the £412 million received in 2022-23, but of course that is after the accelerated reduction of 1% on personal tax rates that I announced last year. So, tax came down by 1% for personal taxation, but tax receipts stayed within £1 million of where tax receipts had been when it had been 1% or more.

Import Duty has come in almost exactly as estimated. Where we estimated £95 million, the forecast outturn is actually £94.9 million. We are, therefore, once again prudently sticking to the same estimate this year. Indeed, most other revenue lines ended the year in line with the prudent estimates that we had made.

During the 2022-23 financial year, we saw how tourism began to recover post COVID. This was shown last year by the £3 million of additional tourist site receipts collected in comparison to the estimate, which took tourist site receipts that year to £6.5 million. The tourism recovery continues

375 this financial year in a sector that had been so brutally hit by COVID, and that can be seen with
increased collections in both tourist site receipts and aviation, in comparison with the estimate
for this financial year. Our estimate for tourist site receipts was £7 million, and you can see that
on line 17 of page 7, also on the blue pages, but in fact the forecast outturn is closer to £9.1 million.
In aviation revenue, Madam Speaker, as you can see from the cumulative total of lines 9 to 11,
also on page 7, an estimate of £4.6 million has turned to an outturn of £5.5 million. It is there in
380 the blue pages, the column headed Forecast Outturn, which is the second column to the right.

These relevant lines, which we can see on page 7 of the Estimates Book, are a credit to the
work done by my dear friend Mr Daryanani in his period as Minister for Tourism. In fact,
Mr Daryanani's revenue lines have increased again this year in areas such as miscellaneous
receipts in the Coach Terminal, which are lines 63 and 64 respectively on page 10, and in the Port
385 Authority maritime and trade licensing, which are lines 40 to 51 on page 9, also of revenue. In my
view, that demonstrates that however much maligned he may have been by his less than generous
shadow, Mr Daryanani did an excellent job of recovering revenue in his areas of ministerial
responsibility, bringing in millions more than estimated at a most challenging period in our history.
My very best wishes go to him now that he is no longer a Member of this House.

390 As I said, most of all the other revenue was in line with expectations, and hon. Members and
those following the debate with the Estimates Book by their side can see, from the bottom of
page 10, that overall departmental fees and receipts came in at approximately £4 million more
than we estimated. I welcome that and credit the team at the Ministry of Finance, led by the
Financial Secretary, Charles Santos, for their work in this respect. It is a real honour to have been
395 elected to lead that Ministry once again.

Moving now to the expenditure we had last year, which is to say the spending of the
Government, I think it is fair to say that we have been able to bring that in once again in a
reasonably well-mannered form, whilst never forgetting that the Government is itself, of course,
not immune from the increasing costs around us. We projected Consolidated Fund charges of
400 £121.1 million, and the forecast is expected to come in at £108.6 million. That can be seen at lines
1 to 9 of page 13 of the Estimates Book, which are the top lines there, which are the Consolidated
Fund charges.

Whilst pensions, on line 3, and legal costs, on line 2, have increased, we have reduced our
interest costs, on line 5, by almost £15 million by using the General Sinking Fund and reducing the
405 interest payable to the Gibraltar Savings Bank. Each of those lines is broken down in greater detail
on page 16. I will say more about this a little later in my address when I talk about the Sinking Fund
and the Savings Bank.

In respect of repayment of tax, in line with our policy in respect of tax refunds, we kept to the
£10 million estimate. That is £10 million that we paid back to taxpayers who had overpaid. We
410 could, of course, pay back less to taxpayers and have a £10 million bigger surplus, but we do not
do that, which is what Members opposite did when they were in government. We gave it back to
the taxpayer, to whom the money belongs.

As for departmental expenditure, if you look at page 14 of the Book, just under line 53, we
have projected £570 million of spending and the forecast outturn came in at £635 million – that
415 is to say just 10% above the estimate. That is on page 14 for those following. Much of the
overspend, that is to say almost £58 million of the departmental overspend, comes from Health,
Elderly Care and the Care Agency. Across these three areas, there has been an overspend of over
£45 million in the GHA, £2.4 million in Elderly Care, and £11.6 million, which hon. Members and
those following the Book can see from line 26 on page 13, in respect of the Care Agency. The fact
420 is that we continue to give the best care and service to the people of Gibraltar, and this comes at
a cost which we sometimes cannot project more accurately for. The provision of new services
sometimes brings additional costs. Added to this is the increasing cost of medical supplies, drugs
and pharmaceuticals. In addition, we continue to ensure that our people are taken care of abroad
with the best care when we cannot provide that care here. All of this makes up the bulk of the
425 overspend. I know that we, as a community, are proud of the care that we provide in Health,

Elderly Care and the Care Agency. This is the attendant bill that we pay for that standard of care. I have no doubt that I will be attacked by Members opposite for this overspend, despite the fact that it was proportionately higher when the Leader of the Opposition was Minister for Health, as I have demonstrated in previous years, but as I have repeatedly said, although we will continue to
430 seek efficiencies, we would not seek to curtail this spending, even if it puts us over our estimates, when it is necessary to provide care for patients.

This year, as the price of energy has settled, the GEA comes in at an overspend of £3 million, which is considerably better than the overspend in financial year 2022-23, when the shooting costs of fuel in the international markets pushed their estimate up from £54 million to £78 million.
435 Despite that, fuel costs remain high compared to the prices we had seen emerging from the pandemic and before the illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Education, the Environment and the collection of refuse have also considerably overspent. These areas have overspent beyond their estimates, but with good reason in some respects. Providing top-level education comes at a cost. We must continue to ensure that our schools are
440 well maintained and well manned and our children receive great education. We are providing more learning support facilities (LSFs) and are manning them better than most, if not all, places in the United Kingdom. We have a greener and cleaner Gibraltar, and that comes at an additional cost. Of course, disposing of Gibraltar's refuse across the border has significantly increased in cost. In fact, this cost has doubled in 2023-24, as the fees charged by the facility across the border have
445 increased across the board; again, a cost charged to us and which was not envisaged when we settled last year's Estimates Book. Government is, therefore, exploring options to deal differently and in a more modern manner with refuse, and we are already working on expressions of interest in this respect.

In terms of the Estimates for the year ahead, we believe that we have demonstrated that
450 financial stability has been restored. I can, today, inform the House and the nation that we are now projecting a £3.3 million surplus for the current year. This is just a slight increase in estimated surplus over the surplus for 2023-24, so we are not out of the woods yet, far from it. We continue to be on the right track, but far from being able to say that we are fully recovered.

Whilst the latest inflation figures available suggest that this has dropped below 3%, it has been
455 over 4% for a number of years, and that has taken its toll on our costs. Indeed, as I have already referred to the House, interest rates have not dropped as quickly as inflation, and that also continues to take a toll on the public finances. As I have told the House in other years, these are not factors we can control, or in some instances even accurately pretend to predict, let alone properly estimate for, but we have nonetheless tried to factor all of these into the estimating
460 process.

We are conservatively estimating revenue for the year 2024-25 of around £733 million again. That is the first number that appears in the middle column on page 1, factored for hundreds of millions. It is the first figure in the centre column on page 1. This is some £30 million below the
465 forecast outturn for 2023-24, which you can see is the first number that appears in the middle column on page 2, just across the page, also factored in hundreds of millions. The reasons for this are as follows. The details, in fact, can once again be seen more clearly on page 6 of the Book, for those who are following, in terms of the estimate on the blue pages.

Tax receipts at lines 1, 2 and 3 of Head 1 on that page are once again going to be conservatively
470 pitched slightly lower than the current outturns. I am confident, however, that the work that Minister Feetham is doing, and some of the measures that I and he will announce today, are likely to increase those numbers in coming years, if not immediately. But like every year, in order to ensure that we do not find ourselves in inadvertent breach of the golden rule, we consistently estimate conservatively in this area of revenue to avoid a nasty surprise at the end of the year if we do not hit our targets.

475 Our Import Duty estimate at line 1 of Head 2 on page 6 remains in line with last year's outturn, which, as I told the House, is not as high as we had expected it would be. Once again, the prudent approach, therefore, although we are detecting signs that this is slowly ticking up, is to simply

predict the same level of revenue again. We will see if there is a recovery, but until it is manifested in pounds and pence, we will continue to be prudent and conservative in estimating revenue from this particular revenue stream.

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The numbers of visitors and tourists continues to increase, as the Tourist Survey shows. The forecast outturn is £2 million higher at line 17 on page 7, and tourism revenue has therefore been pitched higher than previous years, up from £9 million to £11 million, as the figures suggest that the numbers are improving and we should see that greater revenue at least from these sources. It is down to Minister Santos to ensure that those are delivered.

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As usual, all other revenue streams are also estimated on a very prudent basis to ensure that if there is any error, we are underestimating our revenue and not overestimating it. That is how we have set out to estimate every year, and it is a method that we have consistently demonstrated has served us well.

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In terms of expenditure, the spending that we will do in the current financial year 2024-25, that we are projecting, can be seen on page 1 again, under the heading of 'Recurrent Expenditure': Consolidated Fund charges at £120 million, which is exactly the same amount as we had estimated last year, although it came in at £11 million lower, and departmental expenditure at £610 million, which is approximately £40 million more than last year. Again, that can be seen in the expenditure lines under 'Recurrent Expenditure'. The reasons for these anticipated increases are as follows.

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The increase of £12 million of the Consolidated Fund charge, as can be seen from line 5 for Consolidated Fund charges on page 13, which breaks all this down, arises principally from the external cost of borrowing. We have assumed that the base rate will reduce during the year and that is why the estimate is lower than the estimate was for 2023-24, which stood at almost £45 million, although we reduced that to £30 million using the Sinking Fund, as I will explain later. Having said that, the Bank of England did not reduce the base rate two weeks ago, and this could mean that the outturn for 2024-25 may end up exceeding the estimate. I remind the House that the United Kingdom general election was called after the Book was sent to the printers, and the base rate could not, by convention in the United Kingdom, be reduced or indeed increased during the course of a general election campaign. Last year, in the period between sending the Book to the printers and the debate in this House, interest rates actually went up by 0.75%. At least, luckily, that has not been the case again this year. As ever with interest rates, however, we shall have to wait and see.

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Departmental expenditure, which can be seen on page 1 under 'Recurrent Expenditure', is estimated to be just £70,000 shy of £610 million. This is down by £25 million from the forecast outturn last year, just closed, which can be seen directly across the page on page 2. Again, as we have done consistently in the time we have been in office, we continue to be prudent on the spending we are providing for, whilst providing for the increases in inflation and other external factors which could impact us in the coming months. Of course, we continue to provide for more than adequate funding for our health services. This year we have provided an additional £28 million to the Gibraltar Health Authority and £9 million to the Care Agency. In all of this expenditure we will remain prudent in trying to ensure that we spend what we need to spend, but not a penny more.

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It is important to understand the economic picture ahead of us in order to see how the public finances may fare in coming months. In doing so, I will remind the House that last year I advised that the preliminary estimate for the GDP for financial year 2021-22 was £2.55 billion. In fact, the final GDP estimate for financial year 2021-22 has come in at £2.54 billion, which is up 5.1% or by £123 million from the previous year's final estimate. There is very little difference, therefore, between the forecast, the preliminary estimate, and the final estimate for 2021-22. Given the very volatile pandemic and inflationary environment in which we saw these predictions made, for which I congratulate the Statistics Office and our Chief Statistician in particular, they are remarkably accurate. I should add that Ms Kelly-Federico is retiring, and I thank her for her excellent work as our Chief Statistician, always under pressure to deliver and always delivering on time. I wish her a long, healthy and happy retirement.

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530 The preliminary estimate for GDP for 2022-23 is for £2.75 billion. This confirms the strong
bounce-back in the economy, which we could see starting last year and which has had the
predicted positive knock-on effect on the public finances as we have seen revenue at new record
highs. That extraordinary performance, even without a treaty between the UK and the EU,
535 represents a growth of 8.3% or £211.14 million added to the size of our economy. There is a lot
there to be proud of. Of course that was two years ago, as these numbers are provided as a historic
look back to the performance of the economy, but still a lot to be proud of.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the more recent preliminary GDP forecast for 2023-24; that is
the financial year which ended in March this year. The Statistics Office forecast for financial year
2023-24 is a GDP of £2.91 billion. That represents an anticipated increase in the size of our
540 economy of just shy of 6%. That is an economic growth in cash terms of £160.5 million in the size
of the economy. This surpasses the pre-pandemic GDP estimate by 13.3%. So, we are not just
growing from the smaller economy that we had in the years of the pandemic; we are now 13.3%
bigger in economic terms than we were when we arrived at the pandemic.

The growth of the GDP in my time as Chief Minister to date is worth the House keeping in view
545 as the Members opposite get up to deliver what Mr Bossino described as their attacks to come.
In their last full year in office, the party of Members opposite delivered a GDP of £1.082 billion. It
is now almost £2 billion more, an increase under the GSLP Liberal administration, in three terms,
of 169 per cent. That represents an average growth per year of 14 per cent of GDP growth, with
two years of pandemic and eight years of Brexit thrown in. Not bad going. It may be a clue to the
550 reality of what is happening in our economy, quite contrary to the repeated naysaying we get from
Members opposite.

The gross trading profit of companies actually grew by 8.4% in 2022-23 and 5% in 2023-24.
Income from employment increased by 7.5% in 2022-23 and by 6.6% in 2023-24. The Gibraltar
public debt to GDP ratio fell in net terms to 23% of GDP in 2023-24, from 25.6% in 2021-22. In
555 aggregate terms, the ratio is down from 30.7% in 2022-23 to 29.3% in 2023-24. These ratios
continue at a much, much lower rate than that of the UK and most other European countries. In
fact, we had got these ratios as low as 11.2% in net terms and 13.6% in aggregate terms against
GDP. Those were less than half what we had inherited from the party of Members opposite. When
we took office during the course of the financial year 2011-12, the GDP to net debt ratio stood at
560 25%, with no pandemic for the GSD to claim for the increased debt and no Brexit to deal with. In
fact, in financial year 2011-12, aggregate debt, which was £517.7 million, represented 43.1% of a
GDP of £1.2 billion. So, whether one is looking at the aggregate debt ratio to GDP or the net debt
ratio to GDP, I am proud to be able to say that we hold a better record over 12 years in a pandemic
than the party of hon. Members opposite over 16 years.

565 We are also able to point to a lower GDP to tax ratio, despite the two-year, two-point increase
which we started to reduce last year. This year is no different. The ratio was 13.5% when we took
over with a GDP of £1.082 billion and £146 million in total collected in Social Insurance and
personal tax at £122.5 million, so it is a total of £146 million collected in tax, of which
£122.5 million was personal tax and £24.1 million was collected as Social Insurance.

570 In the financial year 2023-24 it is going to be a 10.5% ratio of GDP to tax. This is based on Social
Insurance collection of £55.1 million against a personal tax take of circa £250 million, making a
total of £305.1 million collected on the factor cost GDP calculation of £2.91 billion that I referred
to the House earlier. The GDP to tax ratio in the UK is 32.7%, which is 73.4% higher than in
Gibraltar. In Spain, it is 36.6%, which is 76% higher than in Gibraltar. I do think it is sometimes
575 worth reminding our fellow Gibraltarians just how well off we are compared to others.

Finally, when it comes to, perhaps a little somnoric, GDP calculations, and with all the caveats
that I make about this particular calculation, I want to give the House the annual GDP per capita
calculation. I insist that in our view this is not an exactly meaningful calculation and it does not do
anything for anyone who is struggling on a low income. This is a measure, however, that is often
580 used internationally and it is a measure that the party of Members opposite started to report to
the House annually during the course of the Budget, and that is why I continue to report it.

585 Interestingly, just this weekend, as I was spending the weekend with my Budget Book, I was listening to Mr Nigel Farage presenting his party's views in a meeting in Birmingham. One of the sticks that Mr Farage was using to bash Prime Minister Sunak was the GDP per capita calculation, which he was complaining had gone down for six successive quarters in respect of the United Kingdom. Clearly there are some people who still think that the GDP per capita calculation is relevant.

590 The GDP per capita in Gibraltar is £85,614 per person. At the exchange rate of US\$1.26 to the pound sterling, the GDP per capita of Gibraltar amounts to US\$107,873, placing Gibraltar, this year, second in the world ranking, below Luxembourg on US\$129,810 per capita there, and above Norway and Ireland, which are on \$104,000 per capita. The GDP per capita in the United Kingdom is US\$49,099 per person and in Spain it is US\$33,071, making these important reference point countries for us 25th, down two, and 38th, up two, in the rankings respectively. If Members opposite do not think that this is relevant, they might ask themselves why they made it relevant
595 in their time in office.

I am pleased to say that the strength of our economy means that there is no reason for there to be anyone out of a job. Reducing and sustaining low employment rates is the great benefit of the work that we have done in growing our economy, although I still recall the attacks that the Hon. the Father of the House had to suffer for his Future Job Strategy year after year. And yet, throughout 2023, the quarterly average of registered unemployed stood at 27, down from 29 the year before. I just want to reflect, for those who are new in this House, for those who may be watching the Budget debate for the first time, and for those who may not be aware of how things have changed in Gibraltar in the last 12 years, that I am not talking per cent. I am not saying that unemployment stands at 27% or 29%. When I say 27 and 29, it is individuals. That is to say, there were, for a quarterly average, 27 individuals registered as unemployed, 29 individuals the year before registered as unemployed, and not the same 27 or the same 29. That is the average. Sometimes people register as unemployed because they are going from one job to another, but you register the termination, you register as unemployed, you are going to the next job. That is the best testament to the work that we have done in government, because it was not ever thus.
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605 Perhaps most importantly, as we await the arguments of Members opposite – or, as we were told during the course of Question Time, the attacks, as the Hon. Mr Bossino prefers to refer to them – what is undeniable is that we are maintaining the 94% reduction in unemployment since 2011. Yes, Madam Speaker, you heard right. We have seen a reduction in unemployment of 94% in the time that we have been in office. That is not individuals, not 94 people: 94%. In fact, in the second quarter of 2024, we have further reduced unemployment levels with the average number of registered unemployed individuals at just 20, representing a 96% reduction in unemployment since the second quarter of 2012.
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615 These figures in this area of responsibility are not just statistics or numbers. What this means is that the number of individuals unemployed has been reduced by 422. It was 442 individuals registered unemployed in 2011 when we were elected, despite, as the Hon. the Father of the House will recall, he and I having to deal with a spree of people being employed between July and December. People, I recall, used to turn up at No. 6 Convent Place to see the other Mr Feetham and came out with a job in the months between July and December 2011. And yet, when we were elected, it was 442 registered unemployed. Of course, a lot more people have entered the job market in that period too. It is not that those 442 have been found a job and there are 20 left; it is that those 442 were churned into a job and a lot more people came into the job market too, as a lot more people have come of age in the time that we have been in government. I do get a bit giddy thinking about people coming of age in the time that we have been in government, Madam Speaker, because it reminds me of my own age. That underscores our commitment to economic growth, accompanied by successful job creation, to ensure that every Gibraltarian who wants to work has the opportunity to do so. I am extraordinarily proud of our record in reducing unemployment and I credit the much-maligned Future Job Strategy of the Father of the House and the great diligence of the committed staff of the Employment Ministry – in particular
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635 Mrs Debbie Garcia, who will not stop until she gets Gibraltarians into jobs – for these excellent results over the past decade.

All of that talk of a growing GDP points towards good news in respect of the numbers of people employed in our economy, of course. I am happy to announce that the total employee jobs continue to increase. Now, instead of looking just at people unemployed, let's look at the numbers of people in employment. In the October 2023 Employment Survey, which was tabled in the House
640 last Friday, the number of employee jobs stood at 31,523, marking another record year. Madam Speaker, you will note that when calculating the GDP per capita, based on a population of 32,000, when you have almost 32,000 people at work ... that is why the GDP per capita calculation is not, in our view, one which is very useful in the context of Gibraltar, because, in effect, you have every man, woman, and child just born as in employment because we have such a high employment
645 market. This represents a 1.2%, or 373 actual jobs, increase from the 31,150 recorded in the previous year. The growth comprised of an increase of 359, that is 1.4% full-time jobs; and a slight increase of 14, that is 0.3%, part-time jobs. There were overall job gains in both the private and the public sectors. The highest increase in jobs was seen in the private sector over the year, a growth of 190 jobs, or 0.8%, from 24,553 jobs to 24,743 jobs in October 2023. The public sector
650 also saw an increase of 181, or 3%, in 2023. This figure stood at 6,279, up from 6,098 in 2022, employees in the public sector. The greatest increases registered were in education, health, and social work, reflecting our commitment to strengthening the services that matter most to our community. The MoD also saw an increase of two jobs, or 0.4%, over the year, from 499 to 501. According to the statistics provided in the Employment Survey Report, average gross annual
655 earnings in respect of all employee jobs also increased by 5.7% from £34,105.44 in October 2022 to £36,050.21 in October 2023.

In the Budget debate in July 2022, I announced that the Government had made the decision to exercise our de facto option to acquire all the issued share capital of AquaGib. I will deal with this now because I am talking about the public sector. Last year, I confirmed considerable progress in
660 the acquisition process. I am now pleased to report that we have concluded the negotiation, and the completion of the transaction for the acquisition of the shares should be entirely finalised over the summer period. I shall look forward to announcing the completion of the transaction in coming weeks, likely around the end of the summer months.

I turn now to some of the reserves available to the Government. The Savings Bank now has a
665 reserve of £76 million, up from £67 million last year. Given the manner in which the House has seen Members opposite upping the ante once again in respect of the Savings Bank during the last Question Time, one could be forgiven for thinking that they had left us with a bank with a bountiful kitty. In fact, it is important to remind the whole community, Savings Bank depositors in particular and Members opposite, old and new, that when we were elected, we found that the Savings Bank
670 reserves had been entirely drained by the GSD to flatter their accounts. We found that the reserve had only £1,000 in it. Let's just pause to reflect upon that. When the GSLP Liberal Government was formed on the morning of 9th December 2011 – what I sometimes call the glorious new dawn, a description that is not often found agreeable by Members opposite – the reserves of the Gibraltar Savings Bank were *one thousand pounds*. This was not a nominal line in the Estimates
675 Book. If you look at the Estimates Book, you will find different places where there is a line that says £1,000. That is what we call a nominal line. We cannot estimate it accurately, we think there may be an expenditure, we do not know what it is going to be, so we agree to put in £1,000 to open a line to charge, and that is £1,000. This is not that we found a nominal line of £1,000 because the money was elsewhere. No, it is that the kitty of the Savings Bank, the amount the Savings Bank
680 had in reserve should it need to comply with its statutory obligation in securing the amount for depositors, or for any other purpose, had been reduced to £1,000. I think it was £1,114, or something like that. Where had the money gone? Well, it had gone, I am not saying in any nefarious direction other than to the Government General Account. It had been taken into the Government General Account. In that way, the amounts that we had seen reported as surplus, or

685 the recurrent expenditure of the Government, had been funded by the Savings Bank – not the capital projects but the recurrent expenditure of the Government funded by the Savings Bank.

Today, the Savings Bank has £76 million. Just so that we are clear, because this is a debate about money, a debate about numbers, that is £75,999,000 more than under the party that Members opposite represent, accumulated by this man, the Father of the House, who has
690 responsibility, and has had it from the first day that we were elected, for the Savings Bank. It is important that we reflect on that because I am sure that it will help to put into context what must be the mock concern that hon. Members were seeking to display during Question Time.

It is important that we also reflect on the fact that the surplus of the Government today, the surplus that I am reporting, could have been any amount larger if we pursued the GSD's trick of
695 taking the reserve into the Government's General Account. It is not a trick that I say is in any way improper. You can take your return from your company, if you are a director, whenever you want. You can take your dividend, if you want, or you can leave it in the company and reinvest it in the company. It is a decision that different shareholders make in different ways at different times depending on their personal circumstances. But we do not do that. The highest surplus ever
700 reported in the history of Gibraltar is £80 million. I had the honour of reporting it. We have £76-plus million in the Savings Bank. If we open a line of revenue that is profit from the Savings Bank in the blue pages and every year we put that amount in there and this year we had taken the first year the full amount in there, I would be reporting the second highest surplus in the history of Gibraltar. But we are not doing that, because we are keeping it in the Savings Bank. I
705 think it is hugely important, because that is what hon. Members did, that if we did it we recognise that they would immediately denounce it as absolutely terrible: cooking the books, something they have said to us before; flattering the accounts, something they have said to us before; and any other manner of descriptions of ill which they could come up with. We are going to ignore what they did and we are going to ignore what they say that we do. We are going to continue
710 doing the more prudent thing that we have done, the more efficient thing that we have done, and we will continue to see the growth of the reserve. If not, I would like to see anyone persuade Sir Joe Bossano to do otherwise. Good luck to that. This year, in fact, the reserve is predicted to exceed £80 million.

It is essential that in referring to that kitty, I remind the House that the management of the
715 Savings Bank to put it in this excellent position has been down to the Father of the House, the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano, who has been richly rewarded only with constant criticism by Members opposite for his dedicated work in the steady growth of the bank. But, although I do not know if this is the case or not, I have no doubt that at the same time as they criticise him for political purposes, it is very likely – and I would not criticise them for doing so – that many of them are
720 probably also depositors reaping the rich rewards of the interest that they receive from the bank. We would not know because I do not have access to that information, but nothing would surprise me. The long and the short of it is that we have achieved our surplus and achieved financial stability without having to have recourse to the Savings Bank reserve in that time; another reason to be proud of our record in the stewardship of our collected public finances. To put into context
725 the things that we were hearing from the Leader of the Opposition during the course of the last Question Time when he was getting het up saying that savers and depositors want to know ... Well, I think the thing that savers and depositors will be very pleased to know is that under us there is £80 million set aside in the Savings Bank; under them there was a grand.

Madam Speaker, as I have already alluded to and is trite, it was anticipated that interest rates
730 would reduce during 2023-24 but this did not materialise as much as we would have wanted and our borrowing costs were greater than anticipated. I explained to the House and hon. Members last year that borrowing costs are mitigated by channelling costs through the General Sinking Fund. Therefore, to reduce our expenditure, we used £10 million from the General Sinking Fund to offset our borrowing costs. Indeed, just two weeks ago, the Bank of England, as I have said,
735 maintained rates for now. We nonetheless fully expect that the rates will be ameliorated in coming months.

I turn now to my responsibilities in respect of the Civil Status and Registration Office and HM Customs. Both of these Departments continue to provide excellent support to citizens and key law enforcement support for our community. I now lay on the table a short report of the excellent work being done by these Departments that includes data on births and deaths registered, as well as applications for Gibraltar status, nationality, permanent residence and visas. This report also reports to the House on matters related to what we used to call the Human Resources Department, Social Security and the Civil and Public Service generally. I asked that these be taken as read into the *Hansard* as a handout at Question Time and it is now being circulated. These reports will feature as annexes to the text of my written speech, and that means that I do not have to keep the House as I read through all of the statistical data which is relevant to each of those Departments. [\[Reports of Departments Laid on the Table\]](#)

During the course of this year, I have assigned responsibility for the Tax Office to the Hon. Mr Feetham. He will be addressing the work of that Department during the course of his intervention. In presenting the Appropriation, I will, therefore, limit myself to relevant metrics and the measures to be introduced. Direct tax receipts continue to be the most important contributor to the public finances. The total amount of tax collected in the 2023-24 financial year is £410.8 million. This comprises £255 million in personal taxes and £155.2 million in Corporate Tax. These figures are more or less flat in comparison with the financial year before. Of course, the personal tax receipts include the continued payment of the increased personal tax rate of 2%, which was reduced by 1% last year.

During the last financial year, my Government continued to ensure we have returned moneys to those who have overpaid in tax. We have made it part of our mission in government to repay the money that people overpay us on a timely basis. We have paid people back more and more quickly than any other Government in our history. That means that any taxpayer listening to this debate will know that we are not hanging on to their money to flatter our accounts in any way. During 2022-23, £10 million was allocated to the repayment of tax refunds. In fact, however, we went much further and paid half as much again: we paid £15 million back to taxpayers. Last year, in 2023-24, we had assigned £10 million to repayments and, in fact, we paid £10.2 million back to taxpayers. It was particularly important in the year before, as we were coming out of the pandemic, that we put money back in people's pockets if we were holding it as a result of an overpayment, so we wanted to accelerate that to stimulate the economy, a further demonstration of our cast-iron commitment to ensure that as many taxpayers as possible are repaid the moneys due to them as soon as possible.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the specific budget measures that will apply in this financial year. I will start with measures related to taxation and I will take personal tax rates first. Last year, I accelerated the reduction of the two-year 2% tax rise that we designed to address the increased cost of COVID. It was right that I should do that, for two reasons: first, because we could see our route to re-establishing financial stability, even with the tax reduction; second, because of the added pressure on households arising from the high cost of living that the whole world was suffering. I also committed, during this debate and during the general election campaign, that if we were returned to government, all rates would return to 25% this year. Members opposite went into the election saying they would not rule out tax rises. Well, on this side of the House we keep our promises, we do what we say, and for that reason, exactly as I told the House last year and as I committed to do during the General Election, personal tax will return to 25% this year. We were right to increase taxes as we did for a short, defined period; we are right to reduce tax again now.

In the corporate world, Gibraltar is doing remarkably well. We have seen Gibraltar whitelisted by the Financial Action Task Force. I did not have to receive even a draft of a resignation from Minister Feetham in February/March. We entered the OECD BEPS framework during the course of the lifetime of the last Parliament. We have a Register of Beneficial Ownership which has garnered us great praise internationally and sets us apart from other Overseas Territories and even other EU jurisdictions. We are a credible jurisdiction, which brings added value to companies that establish themselves here. Our jurisdiction is not a place to hide money. Our jurisdiction is a

790 great place from which to do business worldwide and pay a very competitive but credible rate of
tax on corporate income. Our corporate rate is now 12.5%. In order to stay at the forefront of the
international agenda on corporate taxation, Corporate Tax in Gibraltar will increase, as we have
long trailed, to 15%.

Madam Speaker, although inflation is down, a lot of damage has already been done to many
households. Ironically, apart from the price of oil, which is what tends to drive the upward inflation
pressure, few other prices tend to go down; they tend to only go up. Prices that go up tend to
never come down again. So, to do social justice, my Government will continue to act to protect
the incomes of the most vulnerable. For those reasons, we will continue to ensure that those on
the Minimum Wage, those on Disability Benefit and recipients of the state or old age pension will
once again all enjoy the benefits of increases in line with inflation to the payments that they
receive. We will also once again assist the lowest paid in the public sector. I will turn to each of
those in turn.

The Minimum Wage will increase just above our estimate of inflation, which is at 2.6%,
rounded up to 3% given that earlier in the year the rates have been higher. The Minimum Wage
will, therefore, increase by 30 pence, to £8.90 an hour. That is undoubtedly the best way to ensure
that the minimum sum of money that people earn in our economy per hour keeps pace directly
with the cost of living in our economy. As a result, based on a 37.5-hour week, the Minimum Wage
will go up from £16,700 to £17,355, an increase of £585 per annum. Based on 39 hours a week,
the Minimum Wage will go up from £17,440 to £18,049.20. That is an increase of £609.20 per
annum. As a result, those earning least in our economy will, therefore, enjoy the benefit of salary
increases of in the region of £600. In the last three years, the Minimum Wage has gone up by
£1,200 in 2023, by £950 in 2023-24, and now by £600. That is an increase of £2,750 in just three
years for the Minimum Wage, a real demonstration that we are the parties that really care about
working people. Not only are we the party that introduced the Minimum Wage, the GSLP; we are
the party that always raises the Minimum Wage, pandemics permitting, with our colleagues in the
Liberal Party. Members opposite represent a party, however, that complains a lot about the
Minimum Wage when they are in opposition but then only raise it in an election year when they
are in government. When we were first elected, the Minimum Wage was £11,559.60 a year under
the GSD. It is now £6,500 higher at £18,049.20, an increase of £6,500 in 13 years, sticking to an
average of £500 increase per year in the Minimum Wage under the Socialist Liberal Government
that I once again proudly led into government on 13th October last year, a continuing
demonstration to working people that, despite the rhetoric from Members opposite, here and on
the stump, the working people are always better off with a Socialist Liberal Government.

Of course, it is not just the Minimum Wage that will go up by inflation. The state pension and
Disability Benefit will also go up by inflation, which as I said, we expect to be in the region of 2.6%.
The full old age pension payable will now be £571.15 for a single person and £856.90 for a married
couple.

Once again, there will also be an increase for public sector occupational pensions, which will
increase by 2% in line with the provisions of sections 6(2) and (2)(a) of the Pensions (Increase) Act.

The sponsored patients allowance will also increase by the rate of 3%. I want to make sure that
any Gibraltar sponsored patients in the United Kingdom have what they need to be able to face
their time there, due to illness, with dignity. Already, we are so lucky to have Calpe House, which
has been so maligned by an ill-informed few in the past, but it is right that those who most need
it should be adequately provided for when they most need it.

The Social Insurance contributions went up by 1% in each of the last two years, well below
inflation. Since the system introduced by the GSD provides a cap to the contribution, it creates a
situation, when the national Minimum Wage increases above inflation and the cap by less, that
the contribution of 10% of earnings is not paid by anyone on the Minimum Wage, as the cap comes
into play below the Minimum Wage. In addition, the increase in the statutory pension, which is
increasingly affected by higher numbers of non-resident pensioners, will put the fund in the red if
action is not taken. This goes against the established policy of all Governments that the scheme

should be self-funding. The minimum level of increase required to stabilise the fund is a 5% increase in both employee and employer caps to maintain the rate, which is 10% of earnings for employees and 18% for employers, having been reduced from 20% in the last two years. That 5% increase in the caps is, therefore, implemented from today's date, which is the relevant start date for calculations.

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It has long been a key principle of all GSLP and all GSLP Liberal administrations that we respect and will continue to respect the UK parity agreements entered into in the 1970s between the Government and the unions. Indeed, it would be a dereliction of my duty as Chief Minister if I did not champion the hard-fought-for rights that the Father of the House obtained while he was the branch officer of the Transport and General Workers' Union. Our current and future generation of public sector workers must continue to enjoy parity with the UK, as that helps everyone else in our economy and, indeed, in the whole region around us. Parity, so contested by some in the 1970s, is actually one of the key drivers of prosperity for Gibraltar and one of the main elements of how the shared prosperity agenda will succeed if we land a UK-EU treaty. To this end, entry-level salaries for all public servants were increased during the financial year 2023-24 to £21,674. Combined with the public sector support payment at the time, I know that this resulted in a genuine shot in the arm for those on the lowest wages in our public services, those who need it the most. I make no apology for looking out for the interests of care workers, administrative assistants, nurse assistants, school crossing patrol officers, special needs learning support assistants, and the many more roles aligned to this entry point. They know more than most the benefit of having a Socialist Liberal administration looking out for them. They, I know, helped more than most to return us to government. This year, the previously established £21,674 parity entry point is enhanced to £22,874 for all relevant grades within the public sector. This is the new sum in the United Kingdom. Should this sum increase further in the United Kingdom as a result of the ongoing negotiation between the unions and the UK government, then, of course, it will increase here as well. We will continue in contact with our public sector union colleagues in this respect, as we have worked well together in dealing with these issues and look forward to continuing that contact. That means that the entry-level amount in government has increased from £19,119 in 2022 to £22,874 now, which is a 19.64% increase in two years, ahead of all inflation in the relevant period and demonstrating the Government's clear commitment to parity and targeting funds to those that need it most: pounds and pence straight into the pockets of those who are likely to most benefit and most need this additional help, and those amounts are consolidated amounts.

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Last year, the Government introduced the public sector support payment I referred to a moment ago. That was a one-off non-consolidated payment of £1,200 for those on basic pay of less than £5,000; £900 for those on a basic pay of £50,000 to £75,000; and £600 for those on a basic pay of between £75,000 to £100,000. I genuinely believe that that was a very positive way to ensure that we provided the most to those who needed it the most in the very difficult public-finance and cost-of-living environment in which we found ourselves last year. I know it was very much welcomed by those who needed it the most. This year, we have sat down again with union colleagues and have had a number of very positive meetings. We are all on the same side of wanting to ensure our hugely important public servants are properly remunerated. I know that we would all want to do more, but the golden rule is there for a reason. It is a golden rule because it has to be followed as much in the bad times as in the good times, and these are not quite the good times yet. There is still a war in Europe; there is now a war in the Middle East. We have no treaty with the EU yet and we have to be conscious that we may not get one or that we may get one only for a short time, so we cannot indulge in increases in the cost of the public sector beyond what is strictly necessary to help those who need it the most. In the circumstances, this year the Government will once again make a payment of £1,200 to those on a basic salary of less than £50,000; a payment of £900 to those on a basic salary of £50,000 to £75,000; and a payment of £600 to those on a basic salary of £75,000 to £100,000. These payments, this year, will be consolidated and paid proportionally in wages and salaries. The total cost will be, once again, in the region of £6.5 million, distributed between all public sector workers whose basic pay is less

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than £100,000. The bandings and thresholds are those that the Government identified last year and are, in our view, progressive and will afford payment to almost the entirety of the workforce.
895 Once again this year, those earning a basic pay above £100,000 will not receive any assistance payment. We remain strongly of the view that the objective must be to use public money to help those on the lowest incomes at this time. We will, nonetheless, also want to continue talking to our public sector union colleagues, as this process has worked well in ensuring we understand each other on the subject of public sector wages. I very much look forward to continuing to lead those discussions in coming months.
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When addressing the public sector, it is important to also keep in view the income generated by it and, therefore, it is also important that the review of public sector fees and charges should also continue to keep pace with inflation. If we do not do that regularly, we end up having to make bigger increases in the future in one fell swoop. For that reason, as I have done in previous years,
905 and sticking to our salutary discipline on this, in terms of the services provided by the public service, as from 1st August, all fees charged by any Government Department and payable to Government, including licence fees and forms, will increase in line with inflation, estimated at 2.6%, rounded to the nearest half point, that is to say 2.5%, and, in cash terms, rounded to the nearest 50 pence. This may, once again, represent a very minor increase but, first of all, if we look
910 after the pennies the pounds will look after themselves, and second, it is essential in order to ensure that government fees do not once again fall to ridiculous levels.

Madam Speaker, electricity and water charges increased by 8% in 2022-23, taking into account any inflation to 31st July 2022. That was the total increase for the year, although in Spain, the United Kingdom and the rest of Europe, the same charges increased by more than 300% in some
915 instances. Last year, water and electricity bills should have increased by a further 6.2%, at least, to keep pace with inflation as a result of the cost of fuel staying high because of the war in Ukraine. However, recognising the effect of the then continued increase in the cost of living, the Government took the decision to hold electricity and water charges and not put them up last year. I committed that we would not put electricity and water charges up whilst inflation continued to
920 be over 5%. That helped every resident and every business in Gibraltar. Nonetheless, that was a measure that would have been particularly appreciated by the most vulnerable in our community. This year, the benefit of low inflation means we must return to rightly reducing the subsidy paid by the taxpayer in respect of electricity and water charges. Already, the subsidy is down from an initial 50% to approximately 45%. Based on the operation of the Electricity (Charges and Tariffs)
925 (Amendment) Regulations 2021, there will be an increase in electricity tariffs, with effect from the bill for August this year, of 2.6%, in keeping with the increase in the General Index of Retail Prices as at 1st April 2024. Tariffs T3 and T4 will, therefore, increase negligibly by 0.004 pence per unit, resulting in the subsidy being reduced to 43.12%.

The current special stamp duty we introduced in respect of sales of government affordable homes has worked well. It must continue to take effect to prevent speculation in respect of
930 properties developed for a defined social purpose and not for profiteering. Despite that, I want to be clear that, henceforth, the special stamp duty should not apply to sales after an acquisition of an affordable home on the open market. The special stamp duty applies to those who are selling after purchasing from the Government or otherwise buying with the benefit of the taxpayer
935 subsidy.

It is important that the Government, as the biggest spender in the economy, should lead by example in respect of sustainability. We must put our money where our heart is, which is in sustainability and protection of the environment. As a result, during the course of this calendar
940 year we will add sustainability and commitment to net zero as a necessary requirement with which any entity wishing to supply the Government will have to comply. By the first quarter of 2025, the last quarter of this financial year, we will only enter into supply agreements with suppliers who comply with that requirement. We will only procure exceptionally from an entity that does not comply with those requirements. Additionally, we will introduce a tax computation deduction of an additional 50% in respect of any cost or expense of achieving net zero, subject to the

945 Commissioner of Income Tax considering the deduction reasonable and directly associated with achieving the net zero objective. Any such additional deduction will be capped at a maximum of £10,000 per annum.

Once again, the current reduced rate of import duties on fuel is in place to ameliorate the effect on higher fuel prices. This will continue in effect until at least the end of the third quarter
950 of this financial year, that is to say 31st December 2024.

It is important that we incentivise the continued renewal of the Gibraltar vehicle park. To do that, I will introduce a new levy this year. Every vehicle over 10 years old which is not a classic car will, therefore, pay an annual pollution levy of £10 per week, or £520 per vehicle, charged on the anniversary of the first registration of the vehicle, whether in Gibraltar or elsewhere. The fee will
955 be triple for commercial and public service vehicles of more than eight passengers – that is to say £30 a week or £1,560 per annum – as these tend to be the most polluting. This fee will start to be charged as from 1st October this year. This will greatly incentivise the national commercial vehicle park renewal.

At present, electric vehicles, full hybrids and mild hybrids attract 0% import duties. That
960 measure made a lot of sense when we introduced it almost a decade ago. The duty on electric vehicles will remain at 0%. Vehicles propelled by hydrogen or hydrogen fuel cells will also attract a duty at 0%. Mild hybrid vehicles are essentially fuel-propelled vehicles with a small electric motor offering a comparatively minimal amount of power. This system is aimed at giving a vehicle with an internal combustion engine increased performance, hence why it is being introduced in all
965 models, including high-end makes and sports cars. The use of this technology and associated terminology should not be used to greenwash the product to subject them to lower rates of taxation. The latest green NCAP ratings show minimal differences in pollutants between mild hybrid vehicles and petrol-propelled vehicles, meaning that the tax benefits far outweigh any tangible environmental benefits stemming from the use of mild hybrid technology. Furthermore,
970 there is a rapidly increasing market for mild hybrids, and considering that they are currently attracting a 0% duty rate, that significantly reduces the revenue collection for vehicles in general. I therefore introduce an Import Duty of 10% on any mild hybrid vehicles.

Whilst far more environmentally friendly than petrol or diesel and mild hybrid alternatives, hybrids and plug-in hybrid electrical vehicles are becoming increasingly popular in the face of an
975 ever-growing awareness of environmental issues and very affordable availability. Whilst I feel it is important to continue to incentivise the use of hybrid technology, continuing the 0% rate supposes a significant loss now of revenue for HM Government of Gibraltar, while sales are unlikely to be impacted. I therefore introduce an Import Duty in this respect of 5%, which is still significantly less than the rate for petrol and diesel internal combustion engines and half of the
980 duty of mild hybrids. Both of these duties will not apply to vehicles already ordered or ordered before 30th September this year, even if delivered after that date. We will, therefore, see a half-year effect by the next Budget. By way of background for the House, over the past year, a total value of £24 million worth of full and mild hybrid vehicles has been imported into Gibraltar. We are leaving a lot of money on the table and not doing enough to incentivise one type over the
985 other, but this gives the House an idea of the volumes that we are dealing with.

Pleasure craft presently attract an Import Duty rate of 0%. This will be increased to 5% in respect of any importation where the vessel has not been bought before 30th September of this year, whether or not it is imported before or after that date. The cap would be fixed at £35,000, as it is for vehicles. The rationale behind this proposal is that the vessels, as the name implies, can
990 be considered luxury items, pleasure items, and the public already reaped the benefit of the 0% duty rate upon the opening of the small boats marina, which represented a major spike in vessel importations at the time. That marina was also developed at considerable cost to the taxpayer. For the information of the House, over the past two years alone, an average of £2.5 million worth of pleasure craft were imported, giving an indication of the possible collection of duties that may
995 arise.

Under the current system, Import Duty refunds stemming from declaration errors by the importer are time consuming and take up a significant amount of officers' time. This issue is compounded by the fact that these refund requests come at no expense to the declarant who made the error, thereby creating no incentive for the declarant to ensure the accuracy of the values declared. A fee of £25 per refund will, therefore, be introduced. This will serve to mitigate the submission of reckless declarations and creates a revenue stream for HM Government of Gibraltar, albeit a small one. It will also eliminate the request for refunds of less than £25, in which the work involved is disproportionate to the benefit returned to the trader. The start date for this measure will be 1st January 2025, to allow for the relevant amendment to the Licensing Fees Act to be drafted. It is important to note that the fee will not apply to overpayments of duty as a result of HM Customs error; it will apply only where the error is on the part of the importer.

Madam Speaker, I will also be asking the Minister for Health to announce the measures that we will put in place to prevent the sale to anybody born after 2009 of any tobacco and tobacco-related products and measures also to control the sale of vapes in our community. The time has come for Gibraltar to act in this area as other developed economies are acting. There is no good reason to see young people hooked on cigarettes or vapes.

When a young Gibraltarian goes away to study in the United Kingdom, we fund their flights, their accommodation, maintenance and tuition fees. When they sign up to fight to defend us in the Royal Gibraltar Regiment, we proudly thank them and do little more for them. I, like every Gibraltarian and, I am sure, every Member of this House, am proud of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment. As the son of one of the Second 50 in the Gibraltar Defence Force, the precursor of the Regiment, I will always do what I can to help secure the long-term future of the Regiment. I will, therefore, now commence consultation with the Regiment on the introduction of what we might call the Regiment Scholarship, which I intend should provide financial incentives to young persons resident in Gibraltar who would have been eligible for a mandatory university scholarship and who instead opt to join the Royal Gibraltar Regiment and have remained in the Regiment for at least five years. It will be repayable should the individual leave the Regiment within five years after qualifying for the incentive. This will likely involve crediting that person with a sum equivalent to the tuition fee and maintenance grant they would have had for a three-year degree, but against the purchase of an affordable home in Gibraltar from the Government, although we may consider other options also. A full announcement will be made with detailed criteria when we have agreed with the Regiment how we could introduce this measure.

To ensure the safety and quality of properties afforded in respect of short-term holiday lets and to avoid unfair competition with hotels, the Government will introduce a mechanism so that every property offered for short-term rental will have to be registered and inspected. A fee will be payable for registration, and other conditions will apply. This is becoming widespread throughout the world as the popularity of Airbnb-style properties has grown. More details will be made available shortly, but it is the Government's intention to roll out the scheme before the end of the calendar year.

The Government considers that offering the Postgraduate Certificate in Education at the University of Gibraltar and the Masters in Education is a hugely socially beneficial endeavour, as it enables our teachers to qualify and develop without having to leave Gibraltar should they not wish or be able to do so. On the PGCE, which is established and successful, we are delighted to be working with the University and the Department of Education to ensure that it continues to thrive and to assist them with the release of mentors for the course. On the Masters, we look forward to facilitating how teachers can take up this course as it becomes established and grows. I am considering with the Financial Secretary a specific fund for this purpose.

Madam Speaker, new purchase agreements and assignments will become registrable instruments in respect of real property in Gibraltar. A small 0.5% special stamp duty will be payable on assignment of purchase agreements by the assignor in respect of real property in Gibraltar. This will not include sales in respect of subsidised estates, where, in any event, assignments are not permitted.

1050 The First and Second-time Home Buyer Allowance is designed for owner-occupiers who need the taxpayers' assistance. Those benefits will, therefore, be restricted to properties under £800,000. This aligns with last year's 4.5% stamp duty on properties over £800,000. As a downsizing incentive for seniors of 65 years and over, we will introduce the equivalent of the First-time Home Buyer Allowance for those selling after the age of 65 and moving to smaller properties, some of which we hope to be developing ourselves.

1055 Madam Speaker, I now address a number of extraordinary matters before I conclude. The first, of course, has to be the ongoing cost of the McGrail Inquiry. The McGrail Inquiry costs are obviously reflected in the Estimates Book. As can be seen on page 2 of the Book, the costs of the inquiry up to 31st March 2024 were £2.93 million. That is before the start of the intensive oral hearing period. Since then, a further £1.2 million has been spent. That brings the total we have paid to date to approximately £4.12 million. This shows that the inquiry has been, and is being, an
1060 extraordinarily expensive exercise for this community.

I also want to refer the House to the fact that the Supplementary Appropriation Bill for 2022-23 has now been published in the Gazette and will be debated in Parliament as soon as possible. I anticipate we will be able to take it in the post-summer session. Further, in accordance with my announcement the morning after the General Election late last year, the accounts of all
1065 government-owned companies were made available online on 1st April 2024. We published on that date, even though this was a bank holiday, because we keep our commitments. What this means is that we put the following in the public domain. The accounts that had been previously filed at Companies House were already available and could have been obtained at Companies House, but we published them on the government website so that any citizen can access them at
1070 no fee. We also published the draft accounts that would have been required to be filed at Companies House by 31st March but are still to be audited. That gives the public an accelerated right to access these accounts. We published information on 56 companies, more information than has ever been published before, and more information by a long shot than was ever published by Members opposite when they held Government and, in particular, when the Hon.
1075 the Leader of the Opposition was Deputy Chief Minister. We published a combination of full accounts or balance sheets, making up 680 documents that are being made available online. Our commitment is that we will continue to update these documents as the accounts are audited and on an annual basis.

Subsequent to the printing of the Estimates Book, we picked up some typographical errors in
1080 relation to some incorrect references to Ministries or controlling officers. There is no impact on the figures or the Bill due to these errors. I have a table of those typographical errors, which I am going to circulate to hon. Members so that they are aware of the relevant typos, which we will be dealing with during the course of the Committee Stage to correct the Book. I should just say that the Book that has been published online has already had these errors corrected in them. As I said,
1085 they have no impact on the figures in the Bill, they are just incorrect references to some controlling officers etc.

Madam Speaker, as I start to now round up, I want to start where I do every year by thanking all of the public servants of Gibraltar for their support these past 12 years. I never tire of saying that everything that the Government does is delivered, actually, thanks to them. I thank Darren
1090 Grech for his work as Chief Secretary and welcome Glendon Martinez to that role, a role that he has really thrown himself into with great vigour.

In particular, I want to thank you, Madam Speaker, and your predecessors given that there has been a changeover in this election year, and the Clerk and ushers of the House for your fantastic parliamentary support to me as Leader of the House in this election and post-election period.

1095 I want to thank also my former ministerial team and my current ministerial team. It has been a long parliamentary year, punctuated by an election and by hugely disappointing behaviour by a former senior civil servant in this place.

We have now begun a new Parliament and this is the first appropriation of this new Parliament. The marathon has now begun. My advice to those just elected on both sides of the House is to

1100 remember that the lifetime of the Parliament is four years and that the issues which we will be
dealing with by the time that the next election is called will very likely be very different to the
issues that we are dealing with today. But some things will still continue to be determinative. I
therefore want to single out for thanks the Deputy Chief Minister and the Attorney General for
1105 the work that we have done together in the treaty negotiation. That continues to be the greatest
current challenge on the horizon and it remains multifaceted – as I learned to say from FCDO
colleagues, it is the crocodile nearest the canoe – yet in this negotiation and in other challenges, I
am always struck by the resilience of the Gibraltarian and the depth of the team that we have at
Gibraltar’s disposal. I will not tire of repeating how impressed I am by the most extraordinary
dedication and the most incredibility that Team Gibraltar represents. I am genuinely delighted to
1110 have been elected to lead that team once more.

Of course, that leaves my personal team at No. 6 and my team of close protection officers to
thank for their support this extraordinarily difficult year. They know that I would like to say a lot
about each and every one of them, but if I do, the hard crust may crumble and I may embarrass
myself once again. So, as the oven is not for rolls, as my grandmother and, I am sure, everybody’s
1115 grandmother used to say, I will just stick to saying that they know how much I value them.

As my team knows how I feel about them, Members opposite know how I feel about them too.
They know that we know what they are going to say. We know that they are going to present the
same broken record of hyperbole and exaggeration, because Members opposite have been
predicting hell and brimstone since the first financial year when I had the honour to present the
1120 Appropriation Bill after our first election win. That is why we can easily predict what hon. Members
are going to say. We have heard it all before, we have answered it all before and we shall answer
it all again, because as there are new Members in this House we shall have to rehearse old
arguments. Let’s be clear, that is what we are going to get: old arguments. I will say this for hon.
Members opposite who have returned to this place after the election: they certainly are
1125 committed to recycling. But we are also very clear that we have been re-elected to do a job and
deliver an agenda and manifesto. That is *our* agenda and *our* manifesto, to deliver it to *our*
timetable, not theirs, at *our* pace, not the one which they might decide they want us to pursue.

Of course, it is equally true that they have also been elected, not to Government but to this
place; not to govern but to oppose. That, Madam Speaker, obviously means different things to
different people. You rightly indicated that you thought the role of Opposition is to hold the
Government to account. Indeed, they also need to be ready, when in Opposition, to form a
government should an election become necessary. That is the classic understanding of what an
Opposition’s role is. Little did I imagine, Madam Speaker, that you would be faced with the
1130 outburst of political honesty that we all saw and heard from the Hon. Mr Bossino the other day
during Question Time. He made clear in express terms that which we have long been referring the
community to, that the GSD approach to opposition is to attack us, and attack us they will, Madam
Speaker, of that you should have no doubt. Whilst I have spent a considerable time today
explaining figures, defending concepts and challenging concepts, what you will see in coming
hours and days will be a demonstration of what Mr Bossino told you and us to expect: a full-frontal
1140 attack on us. Unfortunately, that attack will not be limited to challenging our ideas or our way of
doing things. That, of course, is fair game. In fact, Madam Speaker, what you will hear us called
will be all sorts of different things. Then, not having descended to insults and personal attacks in
my main address, when I reply to the insults and personal attacks that will no doubt come, they
will say that I am vicious. Well, I have many faults; I know them more than most. One of them is
1145 that when somebody tries to bully me or bully my people, I call them out. So, when someone
comes here to call me a highwayman or says that I am cheating when all that I am doing is trying
to do the job that I have been elected to do by our people to the best of my ability, I will not
hesitate to reply by pointing out the shortcomings in the arguments of those who resort to insults
and personal attacks. I believe that should have no role in the debate in this House, but it may be
1150 what we have to see play out in coming days and hours.

I have no doubt that that is how things will, in fact, play out in coming hours and days, but that will not be what occupies us most in the months after this debate, because we will deal with hon. Members' arguments in this place. But, most importantly, we will leave this place to do the things that the people want us to do, the things that the people have elected us to do, because that is what we are in politics for, to do: to deliver in health, in education, in elderly care, in services for the most vulnerable and in investment in our nation and the environment around us. What we have demonstrated we represent are these annual increases in the Minimum Wage, annual increases to the state pension and the disability benefits, not just in an election year, as was the case when Members opposite were in government. We represent the people in our economy who work hard every day as much as we represent those who cannot work at all. We have unashamedly made it an aim in every one of our Budgets so far to deliver for working people, just as we deliver for people who cannot work, to ensure that there is a job for every Gibraltarian who wants to work, to ensure that those who cannot work are properly provided for, and we have done so again this year in this prosperous Gibraltar that we are rebuilding after COVID, in partnership with entrepreneurs and workers in equal measure. Our approach is to see the long-term effects of our policies, to judge the benefit to Gibraltar and its great people of what we do or do not do. That is why we act, to use our policies as the seeds that grow strongly for our community as a whole; not to act in the short-term interest, not to attack our political rivals regardless of the damage to our nation. Instead, we put Gibraltar first every time and that is what has determined our approach to historic policies on which we have been proved right.

Madam Speaker, now, with a renewed team, with renewed vigour and with a deep desire to give nothing but the best of us, we have put together a Bill for an appropriation that is designed to be good for all of us. For those reasons, I genuinely believe that this Bill deserves the support of the whole House. All hon. Members will have seen these Estimates represent an approach which is based on four key drivers: integrity, stability, affordability and social justice. Those are the litmus tests we have established for every measure I have announced in every Budget session and in every measure that I have announced today also.

Madam Speaker, for all of the reasons I have extensively set out and each of them, I unhesitatingly commend the Bill to the House.

Before I sit down, and given the length of my address, I propose that the House should now recess and return at 3.30 this afternoon. I trust that the short recess will avail the Leader of the Opposition the opportunity to take into consideration the things I have said as he prepares to reply.

Madam Speaker: The House will now recess until 3.30 this afternoon.

The House recessed at 12.35 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.33 pm. – 6.30 p.m.

Gibraltar, Monday, 1st July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.33 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Madam Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5 Before I finish my intervention, one of the measures that I announced this morning has caused
huge consternation in the community: the pollution levy. In consultation with the Minister for
Transport, there is a view that there is a better way of doing that pollution levy, and therefore the
Government will not be proceeding with – **(Two Members: Oh!)** For some reason, there seems to
be great hilarity on the other side’s benches. I guess that that is because of the attack that we are
10 about to see come. In any event, what I am announcing is that the Government will not be
imposing the pollution levy at this stage. We will be continuing with a consultation that the
Ministry for Transport is going to be carrying out at the end of the summer, which they believe
can produce the same effect in a different way, which will be less of an effect on vulnerable
people. In any event, the measure would have exempted pensioners, students, the unemployed
15 and those on low incomes, but the consultation process will be launched and more will be said by
the Minister for Transport during the course of his intervention.

I hope, Madam Speaker, that the hilarity that we see on the Opposition benches will be
matched by the quality of their interventions during the course of the debate today, although
that, of course, would be a turn-up for the books.

20

Madam Speaker: I remind hon. Members they should not speak from seated positions.

Before I put the question, I imagine that some, or indeed all, hon. Members may want to speak
on the general merits and principles of the Bill, and so I would invite the Hon. the Leader of the
Opposition, if he wishes to do so.

25

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I do, indeed, wish to make a contribution.

After this morning, this was more of the Chief Minister we know, just on that little aside
towards the end when he was obviously slightly more riled about, yes, the hilarity on this side of
the House on the issue he has just clarified. Of course, last time they did that, withdrew a measure
30 that they had announced, it took them all of 48 hours to withdraw the now infamous Company
Tax that caused great consternation in the financial services and business area. This has taken
slightly less, and probably, if we had adjourned to an earlier time, it would have been almost a
record own goal scored by the Government on this issue on which I will say something later, as
well, in my contribution.

35

Madam Speaker, let me first start by addressing the tone and content of the Chief Minister’s
speech this morning. This year’s Chief Minister’s speech was different in two ways: it was certainly

shorter – last year I think it was four hours; and it felt like a bit of a set-up, at least an attempt at one. He wants to say in reply, very clearly, that we have attacked him, so he is reserving himself for his reply. Of course, I do not have the luxury of a reply – no Leader of the Opposition ever does – like he did not when he was a Member of the Opposition or Leader of the Opposition.

Madam Speaker, you have been here for a few months but you will have already seen that he is always robust, and on Budgets he is robust to the point of being massively over the top with his replies and with personal denigration. I use the term advisedly because he has before. When he does reply he will, no doubt, not hold back, and say, ‘You see, I was attacked first.’ No doubt he will do the body language better than I do, because I do not do good impersonations. But let’s not play games, because pointing out issues of disagreement of policy or where we think they have misled people or misrepresented the facts is not an attack. It is not an attack to correct half-truths; it is to hold them to account.

He does complain too much. If he does not like what we say or do, he was certainly there first, making exactly the same points and using the same tactics. He is the trailblazer of that particular path that he now condemns – or has he forgotten? In his speech in 2011 as Leader of the Opposition, he predicted that the then Chief Minister would laud his predecessor and trash him, something he does to us and to me and my predecessor by comparison, systematically, but I do not have a problem with that because I know it is politics, and that is fine. He said then, in 2011, that the then Chief Minister, Peter Caruana, would subject them to a barrage of insults and innuendos and he said the that the Chief Minister would, to quote from his own speech, ‘want to denigrate, insult and attempt to humiliate us even more’. He compared the then Chief Minister – not as a compliment, by the way – to de Gaulle, in a pejorative way. He accused the then Chief Minister of turning Parliament into a kasbah, where he sold himself to the lowest bidder; an image that forevermore I will have in my mind, not in a nice way. And he accused the then Chief Minister of having taken from everyone last year – I am quoting from his speech – ‘to buy votes from all, this year’. So he was quite happy then, as Leader of the Opposition, to suggest or insinuate or accuse the then Chief Minister about all those things and more. His own Opposition speeches are littered with what he now calls attacks. It drove the then Chief Minister to say:

He insults me first and then complains that I insult him, and when I have responded to his initiation of insults, then he predicts that I will respond to his initiation of insults.

And that:

What he calls denigration and humiliation is the natural consequence of having to correct the nonsense and the untruths that he utters as a matter of personal style and instinct.

So, two observations, Madam Speaker. He will forgive me for seeing his intervention this morning as the opening salvo in the fake outrage he wants to create for his scene of retaliation. On one view, it is also somewhat ironic that he should complain of what he used to do; in reality, it is not irony, it is just the way he has always presented things. He has always tried to set the scene as a victim. I know this is politics and I am not one for fake outrage. After 13 years, though, he is still up to the same tricks of setting the scene, but this time, of course, with the ability to have the last word or the last lash. Again, that is totally fine because it is politics. What I intend to do is go through the Estimates and make good what we say about this Budget and last year’s Budget. In doing so, we will not shirk from robust language. I will not resort to fake outrage as he does, although I am sure he will in reply.

Last year, I said that the pre-electoral Budget presented by the Chief Minister was a hopeless fiction, and it was. It was heavily charged with a lack of realism that meant that the figures were unachievable, and this must have been known by the Government. They came to this House and sold people a presentation of the financial picture which was plainly impossible to achieve. The results can be seen in this year’s Budget Book and demonstrate that it was, as we said, a hopeless

fiction. The Estimates show that the state of public finances is far less rosy than the Government pretends. It is stuck in a precarious, unsustainable cycle overseen by a Government that simply cannot extract itself from where it is. The financial consequences are suffered by everyone: workers, businesses, the self-employed and families. Worse still, it shows a willingness by the GSLP Liberals to say anything in election year to get elected and to present figures they knew could not be achieved, because that narrative was more convenient than admitting that there would be another deficit and they could not keep to their departmental budgets.

The cumulative result is that the false new dawn has not built the strongest foundations for the future, delivered a child-friendly city, got the job done or kept Gibraltar safe. In the process, Gibraltar has been made more vulnerable. All this meant that the GSLP sought to dupe some people to vote for them on the basis that they could keep to their Budget, that they had restored financial stability and that things were better than they were. They subsequently tried to con others into believing that the Brexit deal was almost there, just 0.01% away, a claim that can now be seen to have also been hopelessly false. Those that they could not dupe or con by those wild financial or Brexit deal claims they tried to buy shamelessly with cash handouts paid, strategically, just before the election, or offers of more money, or promises made in the mad scramble of the last few days before polling day. All in all, the underlying common thread of the Government's behaviour was misinformation in a cavalier relationship with the truth, or sheer desperation to do or say anything to survive, irrespective of the truth or whether it was affordable.

Their attempt to speak the language of prudence today just highlights how precarious their decisions last year were. To say, as they have this morning, and indeed as they did last year, that they restored financial stability at the end of their last term, 2023, is nonsense, given what we are going to see when I go into the analysis of the numbers. Equally, much of what the Chief Minister said this morning is a further tripling down, as I will later describe it, of the hopeless fiction of recovery or prudential management of public finances.

Madam Speaker, as the annual Budget debate is as much State of the Nation as it is a granular examination of public finances, I want to make some opening broad observations on themes afflicting this Government which relate to the specifics of the Appropriation Bill and Estimates. In this first Budget after election year there are some discernible themes as to the events that have unfolded over the last 12 months: first, that the Government misrepresented the position, in a number of areas, to get elected. That campaign of misinformation was already built on a long track record of half-truths or spin or inaccurate information. It was present in the raw numbers on which last year's Budget was built, and we have been proved right in the warnings we gave about the state of public finances, as we will demonstrate.

Second, and despite promises of learning lessons of the past, and in classic misinformation style, promises are not kept and are increasingly hollow post-election. Rather than deliver what has been promised, there is much big talk but small delivery in many cases.

Third, the culture of misinformation does not change. There was a doubling down and now a tripling down in a number of areas, with information emerging post-election of things that had happened before which had been kept from the public eye during the election, or issues that have emerged after polling day in a continuation of the same tactics.

Fourth, the culture of misinformation operates against a backdrop of rampant deficits of financial governance, opaqueness and of lack of value for money, things that the Government and Mr Picardo assiduously promise that they are not. Intransparent or opaque is, in fact, what they are.

Fifth, those deficits are not just financial, they are also democratic and now represent a sharp dividing line as to how we think this community should be governed.

I will touch on all those themes today, and some of my colleagues will roll out examples on those issues, because insofar as the governance of this place, they threaten our economic and political core. It is impossible at times to separate those themes because the culture of misinformation is so deep-rooted, so interwoven in the Chief Minister's political DNA that he has elevated it to a religious fervour. This is a critique of his political philosophy and that adopted by

Members opposite who go along with such methods of governance. None are immune, because they all acquiesce. It now represents a deep chasm of philosophical difference between us.

135 Sometimes, the Hon. Mr Picardo's defence when issues are pointed out is that in the past things were done in this way or that, and that may be when there were other leaders of this community. Neither he nor I were leading this community on either side then, in his case at least not until April 2011 – but I thought he was supposed to be the glorious new dawn that professed to do things differently, and I am judging him on his record as Chief Minister since 2011. Such a
140 new dawn should not need the feeble defence of saying he was a bit better than the past, surely. He promised much more and should be judged on those standards because, as he knows and I know, painfully at times, being Chief Minister of this community matters. It means the buck stops there, but it also means you can take the lead, the final decision, and change things. There are things where he has stamped his mark, admittedly – on social policy in some areas, for example –
145 but in the area of good governance, financial governance, transparency, democratic governance, truth and information, he has singularly disappointed and failed. He has become a caricature, the opposite of what he professes to be, and he has had 13 years already.

Last October, this administration hobbled to an electoral win, heavily tarnished by its own legacy and reputation. In its usual style, its reaction through the Chief Minister – it is the
150 immediate reaction – was to first say that the things they had been criticised for during the election campaign were untrue. Key to the culture of misinformation is the rubbishing of the opponent and the facts, and, in the confusion, people no longer know who to believe. Their success has been built on that increasingly false façade, which threatens to fall in on itself but first undermines the credibility of politics with it. The issues that people were concerned about and that we campaigned on during the election were not invented and have not gone away. People
155 still want better controls on waste and abuse or better governance or accountability. Many people remain deeply disenchanted with how this Government has failed in many areas.

I have to say that there were some hopes of a different approach a week after the election when the Chief Minister spoke of learning lessons, but even then they were enmeshed with a series of contradictions that were warning signs for the future. He said on 19th October that he
160 was 'very keen' to look at problems and fix them, that they had constantly been hearing the voice of the people 'to be a better Government' and that he was 'keen to show Gibraltar we have listened'. In that same interview there were also flashing red lights, like the hubris that took him to say that he effectively lived by the creed of the 'sword of truth'. It is classic misinformation to
165 present yourself as you are not and represent the facts as they are not, in the hope that it is difficult to discern the truth.

The Chief Minister knows I have characterised him and his Government, on occasion, as Orwellian in its approach. Recently, he complained about it. I am not sure if the complaint was
170 about the repetition of the description 'Orwellian' or because the truth hurt. The thing is that the author seems best to encapsulate his and their approach to politics. Famously, in George Orwell's *1984*, the party in power were very keen to control the information given to the people. As a quote from the book says:

And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past.'

And that:

Whatever the Party holds to be the truth, is truth. It is impossible to see reality except by looking through the eyes of the Party.

175 Orwell also observed that the consequence of that philosophy was that:

Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth.

180 This misinformation was very present in the hopeless fiction that was last year's Budget, because last year – 12 months after presenting, in June 2022, the worst Budget ever, as he called it – the Chief Minister came to this House to announce a minor miracle: that they would achieve a small budget surplus by March 2024 because they had achieved what he described in joyous terms as the restoration of financial stability, not just here but to the Chamber of Commerce at a dinner. After all, it was election year, so they had to promise big and self-anoint themselves as economic gurus: all part of the misinformation that was to follow.

I said during my Budget speech last year:

this projection is built on a hopeless fiction. It does not stand up to scrutiny and is constructed on a simple manipulation of figures and an underprojection of Estimates in areas where the Government must know the projections are downright fanciful, unrealistic or lacking in any substance whatsoever. It is a fiction because it is a convenient narrative months before a General Election, but a fiction nonetheless.

For the Government and the Chief Minister in particular to seek to rewrite its financial record and cast its projections in this way by pretending that things are better than they are is a disservice to the electorate and a disservice to the need to have a responsible approach to our public finances at this very delicate juncture. That pretence that things are better than they are can only generate natural expectations, when the reality is that people should be told how serious things are. And for what? The perceived short-term electoral gain of the party in power, but to the detriment of Gibraltar's wider interests. We refuse to tell our people electoral fairy tales.

I added:

the surplus projected for 2024 is built on a deeply massaged set of figures which given the history of unrealistic figures and lack of discipline will likely lead to a year in which they will, once again, not deliver what they promise in many key areas. The surplus will not materialise, if this analysis is right, without some heavy changes of position or other adjustments or savings throughout the financial year affecting parts of the current Estimates.

185 – things that have happened now, as I will explain –

But because its spending projections are massaged, unrealistic or, where realistic, are simply not met through indiscipline or because there is waste or recklessness, we continue in this spiral of financial crisis with a Government addicted to debt and in an unbreakable cycle of unrealistic projections masking the real picture.

That is the picture being taken to the election. Presenting a false picture of solvency and financial health to the electorate ...

190 Those statements have been borne out. The figures that we said were unrealistic were, indeed, unrealistic. Where we said the Government could not meet its projections, they have not met their projections. In many areas, they have been not thousands but millions of pounds off the mark. The only thing that has prevented this being obvious in the financial bottom line this year is a series of systematic decisions to camouflage the effect and massage the figures. They have not paid things that they said they would in the way they said they would, and in doing so it has created a mirage of success when, in reality, all they have delivered is failure. That is the only reason they report a surplus of just over £1.9 million. This shows that the proclaimed recovery is untrue and current policies unsustainable. Compounding this, they will repeat that into the future
195 next year, because some aspects of their Budget this year repeat those very same flaws of last year.

200 Madam Speaker, before we get to assess how last year's prediction of a hopeless fiction performed, let us set it into the wider context of overall figures over the last few years. In financial year 2021-22, the year that Joe Bossano described as the year of the worst deficit ever, in overall terms there was a significant departmental overspend of around £35 million. Departments failed to keep to their budgets, despite the severity of the financial picture, with an uncontrolled overall deficit and the Government having to borrow £100 million just to pay wages in 2021-22. This led to the promised temporary Income Tax increases that year, as well as other charges. Given the
205 unprecedented debt to fund recurrent expenses and wages, there was an expectation of greater prudence and discipline, that the Government would keep to its budget so that it would show

taxpayers, who had been taxed more heavily, that at least the Government was rigorously keeping to its Estimates carefully. Instead, however, the departmental over-expenditure was there again in 2022-23, and it is here again this year in 2023-24, although this time of a much larger size than in the year of the worst deficit ever. That is partly because the figures were simply unrealistic last year, as well as, perhaps, some indiscipline in some areas. They were, as we said, a hopeless fiction. And that is not just voodoo economics, it is Paul Daniels accounting – showing my age; I could not find a more modern magician, although I am sure there are some.

In 2021-22, the forecast total Consolidated Fund expenditure was £768 million. In fact, they spent much more: £859 million. When the Government came to Parliament to present the Budget for 2022-23, they promised to spend £136 million less than they had done the previous year. We warned in 2022 that those projections were unrealistic, given the previous results. In overall terms, the Government promised to spend £723 million in 2022-23 in Consolidated Fund expenditure, in other words £45 million less than their promise for 2021-22, which had been £768 million, which they had failed to keep to anyway. In 2022-23, they spent £791 million instead of the £723 million they promised to spend; in other words, £68 million more. The departmental over-expenditure alone in 2022-23 was around £55 million. This year it is even higher.

So, having had a departmental overspend in 2021-22 of £35 million, and increased tax to try to balance the books, the Government could still not manage its budget properly and there was an even bigger departmental overspend in 2022-23 of around £55 million and an even bigger one now. As we said last year, this was because of an inability to keep to their budget or because the figures presented were hopelessly unrealistic. As it is not the first time that we were warning that the figures were unrealistic, I suggested last year that if this was a deliberate ploy to massage the figures, it was very grave. I said, to quote from my speech:

What confidence can you have in Mr Picardo or his Budget surplus if his Government cannot stick to its promises on handling your money? How can you trust such a Government on public finances? You would have thought that the figures in the Budget book would be realistic. That would be the least you should expect from your Government. If, on the other hand, the figures were not realistic, this would reveal a much wider and dangerous malaise that is symptomatic of a Government that is unwilling to be transparent with its citizens, that is opaque with its finances and deliberately masks the true financial picture from the voter.

The reality is that it is deeply unsatisfactory for the citizen to have to hear figures and spending projections that are unreal. Every citizen will understand that if a family buys food and it costs them, weekly, £150 or £200, there is no point pretending that you will spend £10 a week on food for a family of four next year, but that is, in effect, what the Government have been doing in some areas.

They have openly been politically dishonest with the electorate on the numbers, and so, for the same reasons as last year, I simply cannot believe that some of the figures presented for next year, 2024-25, are realistic. Last year, they were obviously not so, and I turn to that with examples.

In 2022 the projected £128 million expenditure for the GHA for 2022-23 looked extremely unrealistic, as it was over £40 million less than it had actually spent in 2021-22. In 2022, I warned:

Are these figures realistic? Will they keep to the Budget this time, and will they do so in a way that the public service is not impaired? That is what the user expects.

The GHA did not stick to their budget of £128 million and spent £155 million in 2022-23. Again, last year we warned about the unrealistic projections being made for 2023-24. These were brought about principally by wholly unrealistic figures in the health and care sectors. If realistic figures had been presented, then instead of a projected surplus there would have been a projected deficit for last year.

If you ask the question ‘How have those unrealistic projections performed?’ the answer is it was always going to be badly. We said that there was no way that, having spent £155 million on health in 2022-23, the GHA was going to spend £129 million in 2023-24 – in other words,

£26 million, or 17%, less than 2022-23. So, how has the GHA done it? Has it spent the £129 million that hon. Members promised before the election it would? The answer to that is no. It spent £172 million instead of £129 million, £43 million more than the projection and £17 million more than in 2022-23. This year, they are repeating and doubling down on the unrealistic projections. Having spent £172 million in 2023-24, they now say they will spend £156 million in 2024-25; in other words, around 10% less than last year. Not only have they been plainly unrealistic for two years running; they are repeating this again. This is no accident. This is now a deliberate strategy of under-projecting to massage the figures so they look better than they are. That is a financial disgrace and is precisely doing what we think is one of the big themes of this GSLP administration, to fail to tell the truth to people and to pretend that they are doing a better job of things than they actually are.

Equally, they promised in last year's Budget that the Care Agency was going to spend £19.8 million in 2023-24, something that we said was totally unrealistic – £7 million less than they spent in 2022-23. That was totally unrealistic and we warned them that it was being unrealistic. In fact, the Care Agency spent nearly £31.5 million in 2023-24, £12 million more than they promised to spend. As we said last year, the projected surplus was built on a series of unrealistic figures, which, of course, never materialised.

I want to give you, Madam Speaker, a few examples. The costs of visiting consultants were supposed to be £700,000 less in 2023-24 than in 2022-23. In fact, the visiting consultants cost £2.6 million, £1.1 million more expensive than they said. The drugs and pharmaceuticals budget was supposed to cost £2 million less in 2023-24 than was spent in 2022-23. In fact, it cost almost £2 million more than in 2022-23, a total of almost £11 million. The Government wanted to spend £2 million less on prescriptions in 2023-24 than in 2022-23. In fact, they spent £3 million more on prescriptions, a total of £12 million. The Government was going to spend £3 million less on sponsored patients in 2023-24 than in 2022-23. In fact, they spent £6 million more in 2023-24, a total of £16 million. They wanted to spend £1 million less in medical and surgical appliances in 2023-24 than they spent in 2022-23. In fact, they spent £2 million more in 2023-24, a total of over £4 million. The Care Agency was supposed to spend £6 million less on relief cover, but in fact spent £13.8 million, £3.5 million more than last year and well over the projection. That was because the figures presented to the Parliament were totally unrealistic, and they must have known it. That must definitely have been the case when notional figures were inserted in areas where plainly substantial sums would be incurred – and they are repeating it this year.

The extent of health spending is not the issue. I repeat: the extent of health spending is not the issue. The issue is the lack of reality, or misinformation. So, let me be very clear. I am not criticising the spending on health or care. I am saying that the Ministers knew those figures were unrealistic and still presented them, and, in that, they have political responsibility for presenting material that they knew could never be met. I am also not blaming civil servants. I am blaming Ministers, because it is a political responsibility to come to this House with these figures knowing that some of these areas are clearly unrealistic. Ministers have an obligation to test and scrutinise estimates before they are presented, to satisfy themselves that they are realistic. Equally, the responsibility for massaging figures is political if they are wildly unrealistic. You can always get a figure wrong, but if you know you are going to spend millions and, instead, provide £1,000, it is unrealistic. It is Ministers who are presenting and asking us to vote for this appropriation. It is Ministers who will and do have the authority and control to direct spending and how these numbers are presented. It is Ministers who take decisions on that and on the measures to present, and, indeed, on the measures to withdraw once they are presented. It is Ministers who have a responsibility, not just to Parliament but to the people, to present reality and not a hopeless fiction.

So, in some ways, they are repeating these issues in this year's 2024-25 Estimates, although not as catastrophically badly as last year, but still there are a series of under-projections that are unrealistic, that endanger the projected surplus. The under-projections in 2023-24 were not just happening in the health and care sectors. They were happening in other areas of the Budget where

big numbers were inevitable and instead small or notional numbers were actually provided. For
300 example, in Education the Government provided only £1,000 for temporary cover for teachers in
2023-24. This is a provision that they knew 100% they could not keep to because the Government
knows they will have to spend moneys on cover for teachers. They regularly, in fact, spend more
than £1 million in this area, so providing £1,000 was notional and hopeless. They knew they spent
£1.6 million on this in 2018-19; they spent £3.99 million in 2019-21, the double financial year; they
305 spent £3.15 million in 2021-22; and they spent £1.9 million in 2022-23. In other words, it was a
complete fiction to pretend that they would spend £1,000 on this item, or, indeed, that they did
not have the experience of previous years to give a realistic forecast. I understand when you
create a line in accounting, when you do not have that experience, but when you have the
experience it was hopelessly unrealistic and, indeed, inevitable. Indeed, they spent £1.67 million
310 on temporary cover last year, in 2023-24 – as we said, inevitable – and they are doing so again this
year, another notional £1,000. It is not as if these items are always provided as notional figures in
every year. There are often realistic figures provided for in many of the items we are pointing to.

Last year, I showed how wildly unreal some of these numbers were. Taking the example of the
sponsored patients expenditure in Health, I reminded this House that the GHA expenditure did
315 not justify the wild forecasts. In 2018-19, the GHA had spent £11.4 million in relation to sponsored
patients and in the double year, 2019-21, they spent £33.65 million; in other words, an average
of £16.8 million for each of those years. In 2021-22, they spent £14.75 million on sponsored
patients, and in 2022-23 they spent £13.72 million. I said last year:

How, then, is it serious to project that sponsored patients will cost less than it did in 2018? The sum projected is
£10 million. That is the same sum they projected last year, and we told them that was unrealistic. They ended up
spending £13.72 million so how is £10 million realistic this year?

This is my third warning now in this area. Of course we know it was not and we now know that
320 the GHA actually spent £16 million on sponsored patients. So, I repeat to the new Health Minister
the warning I gave her predecessors: how is it now realistic that the Government project an
expenditure on sponsored patients for 2024-25 of a sum less than they spent in 2018, six years
ago?

There is a similar lack of realism in other areas. Having spent £6 million in locum cover last
325 year, the GHA are projecting to cut this by 50% to £3 million and to do the same with bank cover,
which cost £2.6 million last year and is supposed to be reduced to £1.3 million in 2024-25. We will
see how those figures end up. Additionally, having spent £4.5 million on visiting consultants, the
GHA are apparently meant to spend £2.2 million. I just observe that while that figure is not
notional, and, therefore, better than last year, these big drops in these important elements of the
330 GHA budget suggest also a lack of realism.

The same health warning can be made in the overall budget for the Care Agency, which is
supposed to fall by more than 10%, or £3 million, to £28.1 million, even though the Care Agency
spent £31.4 million last year. Given that it is not being suggested that services will be cut or suffer,
it is perplexing to see where that level of savings will materialise. There is a proposed possible
335 merger in this area, but it has not yet been the suggestion that jobs are going to be cut or there is
going to be a creation of savings. That, so far, has not, as we understand it, been the dominant
theory behind the proposed merger, but rather an improvement to how services are delivered.
So, if it is not about savings, we struggle to see how the Care Agency will spend £3 million, 10%,
less than they spent last year.

340 As I said, we do not criticise the funding of healthcare or education. We are merely pointing
out that these figures are unrealistic from the outset and that the Government must know that
from experience of previous years. By following the same tactic of under-providing through a set
of unrealistic figures it knows cannot be delivered, it produces a false picture of the financial
bottom line, and that brings me to why the surplus is what it is and why it is unrealistic in practice.

345 We will ask and those who have been listening will ask how is it that despite that lack of realism
and that over-expenditure in those key areas, the Government can report a small surplus of
£1.9 million. The answer is very simple: because there has been a massaging of the books, a sleight
of accounting hand to ensure that things they said they would do, payments they said they would
350 in key areas is masked. There will be more on this from my colleague the Shadow Finance Minister,
Roy Clinton, but here are some headline numbers on the sleight of hand, so we are all clear what
we are talking about.

In overall terms, the departmental expenditure promised last year was £570 million, which we
thought was unrealistic because it was already supposed to be reduced by £33 million from the
355 amounts that had been spent in 2022-23, and we doubted they would keep to those levels given
the built-in lack of realism. As we predicted, they could not keep to that funding and instead the
departmental expenditure was £635 million; in other words, £65 million more than they
promised. So, if you go back to what I was saying earlier, £35 million over-expenditure one year,
another £55 million, and this time £65 million: it is a pattern of departmental over-expenditure
360 that shows either unrealism or lack of discipline. Equally, the projection for 2024-25 is that
Departments will spend £610 million. The hon. Members opposite come successively to this
House to say, 'I am going to spend less than I spent last year,' and we say, 'Yes, but some of the
numbers are unrealistic because of this, that and the other,' and we are successively proved right
on these numbers. Given previous performances, we are absolutely doubtful that they will meet
365 that projection of spending £610 million on departmental expenditure next year.

If Departments overspent by £65 million in 2023-24 and yet they still delivered a small surplus,
how was this done? Well, because a number of things did not happen which they said they would
happen. First, a contribution to government-owned companies of £30 million that has
systematically been made over the last few years was not made. Instead, there has been an
370 advance, but that has affected the financial bottom line. If there had been a contribution to
government-owned companies of £30 million as planned in last year's Estimates, then there
would have been a deficit of almost £30 million, which is what they said they would do last year.
On the basis of departmental expenditure, had they made the contribution, you would have
already had a deficit of almost £30 million. Additionally, certain Social Security payments forecast
375 to be made last year of around £16 million were not made at all. For example, a £7 million
contribution to the Statutory Benefits Fund was not made, or was lower. Of a projected £15 million
payment to the Social Assistance Fund, only £6 million was paid. Additionally, there was
£14 million less paid out of the Consolidated Fund for public debt charges. Just by those
mechanisms alone, a deficit of tens of millions, well over £40 million, was transformed into a small
380 surplus. My colleague Roy Clinton will conduct a more scientific assessment of those numbers in
his own contribution, but those figures quickly reveal what has happened here.

As we predicted last year, they have not kept to the departmental projections in the key areas
we pointed out. The reality is that the Government can only present themselves as just about
having broken even through that sleight of hand of not making other payments they said they
385 would, or other necessary expenditure. It is not because of any underlying financial strength or
solvency. It is not because they have restored financial stability or are some kind of public finance
gurus. They have just moved money around, that is all. They have systematically spent more than
they said to the people they would.

Projections for 2024-25 in several Departments are again supposed to be lower than last year,
390 which again seems suspect, and time will tell in that respect. It means that the forecast surplus of
£3.2 million is as suspect this year as last year's projections were. Indeed, in 2024-25, this coming
year, they will not have the buffer of the £30 million contribution to government-owned
companies to play with, which in itself makes it harder to conceal the bottom line of
over-expenditure by Departments.

395 Before I turn to other parts of my speech, I want to just comment on the Improvement and
Development Fund. For the third Budget running, the Government says it is intending to make a

contribution of only £1 million to the Improvement and Development Fund. In the last two financial years, 2022-23 and 2023-24, they have not even done that, making a zero contribution to the fund instead of the promised £1 million. That fund, from which projects are delivered, will depend on income from continuing sales of land to continue to fund its activity, but the forecast revenue on land sales is far lower than last year, so it seems clear that unless other revenue emerges there will be an effective running down of the current balance of the I&D Fund to deliver the spending on projects of nearly £41 million. For example, the opening balance on 1st April 2023 of the Improvement and Development Fund was £56.5 million, the opening balance at 1st April 2024 was £32 million, and the estimated closing balance at 31st March 2025 is £2.2 million, the lowest it has been since 1st April 2022, in the last few years anyway, when the forecast balance was around £728,000. Rather than the signs of recovery, this shows little current financial flexibility. That is the reality.

Additionally, in that Improvement and Development Fund, fairly low or notional sums are being provided in respect of some major projects, be it on the urban wastewater treatment plant, £250,000, or housing projects, when those projects will be very financially significant once they get off the ground. But there are some projects there that could affect the overall financial picture in relation to that fund: the aforementioned notional sum in the urban wastewater treatment plant, which is likely to cost tens of millions. Last year, £330,000 was spent towards the Island Games facilities, a games that happened in July 2019, so proof of the unsatisfactory way that project was carried out is the fact that the financial effects are being felt long after those games were consigned to history. Having spent £1.6 million last year on the so-called Sustainable Transport Plan and £1.2 million the year before that, another £500,000 is projected to be spent in that area this year. In 2022-23, the so-called digital transformation saw spending of £3.35 million. Last year they were supposed to spend £800,000 but instead spent almost £2 million, with another £800,000 projected for this year. People will wonder what is going on in terms of actual delivery when so much money goes to the so-called digital transformation and you do not see a quality-of-service improvement of that type.

Madam Speaker, layered over the problems created by a Budget which was a hopeless fiction are the problems created by unprecedented debt, overall fragility created by recurrent expenditure at levels beyond or at sheer limits of present revenue streams without sufficient value for money or political control. This level of debt is masked behind opacity and is now generational in nature, given its size. It also affects our financial stability. As my colleague the Shadow Finance Minister will explain in his own contribution, the headline figures of total gross direct and indirect debt are staggering and now well over £2 billion. This inevitably impacts on everything that can be done, and on the citizen in terms of wages, jobs or tax.

The Government is prone to blame the debt situation on COVID, as they did to a large extent today, but as we have said repeatedly, we already had gross direct and indirect debt of £1.3 billion before COVID arrived on the scene. When we supported the Emergency COVID Budget in March 2020, we caveated our position because of the historic debt and on the principle of whether we should have been so much in debt at that point. Of course, as we have also repeatedly pointed out, the fact that we were already £1.3 billion in debt before COVID was due to one of the biggest breaches of promise by Mr Picardo when, in 2011, he promised to halve the then existing gross debt of £480 million. He made then what he called a promise in the glorious new dawn in, to quote, 'clear and unambiguous terms' and, in a sign of the drama to come, signed it off as part of his letter to the people in the foreword to the 2011 manifesto. In a video before that election, he prophesied that, as he called it, it was that spiral of debt that can lead us to ruin. He was still promising, after that election, to halve the debt by the 2015 election.

Fast forward now, 13 years from 2011, and the public debt has been more than quadrupled to over £2 billion, instead of being halved to £250 million. That debt is a continuing and mounting problem. Without flexibility, it affects wage rises or future sustainability. It can also mean that our people have to pay more because of repeated promises to keep to budgets or to make savings that are not met. How can he say, in that context, that the biggest element of the debt is the

450 COVID debt, when that is a figure of over £400 million from a total gross direct and indirect debt of well over £2 billion? Then he treats us, this morning, to a GDP debt ratio calculation that conveniently does not factor in the well-over £1 billion in indirect debt. If he did so, things would be far from rosy.

455 Madam Speaker, there has been a doubling down on the misinformation style of the Government after the Budget last year in the pre-election period, in a variety of ways. First, the pre-election cash handouts, as we call them: having presented the hopeless fiction of a Budget last year, they also combined it with a series of cash handouts to public servants, which they promised to pay, and did pay, in September 2023. What a lucky coincidence: the month that the Parliament was dissolved for the General Election. They were nothing more than an attempt to buy votes at a cost of £6.5 million at a crucial time. The pre-election cash handouts were targeted at the public sector without actually assessing need. That is what we said last year. It disappointed many people. These handouts did not provide workers in the public sector on lower pay with pensionable increases to salaries. What they got instead was a one-off payment. Some workers in the private sector found these payments, that cost £6.5 million, hard to stomach. As we said last year, the nakedness of the raw politics was evident, in that all public sector workers up to an income of £100,000 got this. This was more about votes than helping people on low incomes, because if they really had the spare cash, which we doubted then and still doubt, our view was that the help should have been targeted to those on average or low incomes and thresholds below £50,000, by giving more assistance to those people only. Handouts to persons on higher incomes, which is what the handouts partly achieved, were incomprehensible, unless, of course, they were electoral in nature. They were incomprehensible to private sector workers on low to medium incomes, who were surprised that in circumstances in which the Government could not keep to its own budget, so they had to endure higher tax, had successively increased taxes, charges and fees, and there was a food price hike, their taxpayer moneys were going to fund election handouts to some people on incomes more than double or triple theirs. Under the Government's electorally driven payments, families with joint incomes of £40,000 or £50,000 in the private sector were contributing their hard-earned moneys to election handouts for persons earning £95,000 in the public sector, or, put another way, to a household where there might be two senior civil servants earning a joint income in excess of £180,000.

475 Last year, the Chief Minister promised that those election handouts, or lump-sum payments, would be funded out of the cash surplus and savings that he had directed Ministers to make. He put his most serious face on at this point in last year's Budget. Those payments were going to cost £6.5 million on their own figures and we doubted that savings could actually be made, but waited to see if they would deliver. Mr Picardo, the Hon. the Chief Minister, said solemnly during last year's Budget:

Consequently, this extraordinary assistance payment, although not recurrent, must be met by the projected surplus of £2.5 million and savings which do not affect frontline services. Given that the payments the Government will announce will exceed this projected surplus, Ministers will be asked to identify savings of a minimum of £500,000 within their respective portfolios without these savings impacting the provision of public services. In any event, we also anticipate that the estimate will be higher.

485 Presumably he meant the estimate of savings would be higher. The hubris, or misinformation, was incredible. So, how have they done after that categorical promise? Well, in the 52 heads of departmental expenditure in 2023-24 there are only two where that is the case, and one of them is Social Security, where, as I have already explained, the only reason they are under budget is because they did not make payments of £16 million towards the Social Assistance Fund or the Statutory Benefits Fund. Everyone else, from the heads of departmental expenditure, did not comply with the Chief Minister's direction, so the cash handouts were not paid out of savings, as promised. Was that a simple failure of policy or was it misinformation against the backdrop of a hopeless fiction of a Budget and knowledge that that promise could not be met when it was made?

495 The second aspect where they doubled down on information was on Brexit, because in that
same pre-election month, in an interview with *El País* newspaper on 9th September 2023, the
Chief Minister said that they were 0.01% away from an agreement, a position deliberately
expressed in that way to design the most hope and deliver the most votes in a re-election bid. If
genuine, at that point, 10 months ago, we were supposed to have been 99.99% there. Madam
Speaker, you may forgive me, because at the time it almost sounded like his own version of the
500 'oven-ready' Brexit deal that Boris Johnson had promised the people of the United Kingdom in
2019 as part of his own election campaign. I did not know he was such a fan. Of course, we now
also know that Mr Johnson's deal was not so oven ready. It took another 15 months to cross the
line and has been severely criticised. In a 2022 article, *The Guardian* newspaper bemoaned that
505 'Boris Johnson's oven-ready deal has left us with egg on our faces – the PM's Brexit promises
turned out to be not even half baked.' That article also criticised the 'propaganda and lies' of that
campaign. I am not sure if the Chief Minister is modelling the twilight of his stewardship on the
incredible fallen angel that is Mr Johnson.

I doubt most people now think that last September, 10 months ago, we were 99.99% there, in
terms of getting a treaty with the EU across the line. That is now increasingly looking like another
510 tall tale in quite a repertoire of misinformation, but I suppose it may have had the desired effect
of persuading sufficient people that he was close enough and should not be replaced. Some
people may think that for him it is increasingly evident that it was about means to an end and that
the means sometimes do not really matter so much. Eight years on from a Brexit referendum, we
continue to await the conclusion of those talks in the hope that an agreement will be reached that
515 is safe and beneficial. We will make that analysis and judgement once this is published, if it is. As
we have so far, we will continue to give the Members opposite political space to conclude such an
agreement, if it is possible to do so.

Third, Madam Speaker, in the context of the doubling down, as polling day neared at the last
election, there was a culmination of the usual 'all things to all men' style of politics of Members
520 opposite and the factory of letters written to individuals or associations with pre-electoral
promises, many of which are notoriously abandoned post-election: misinformation, combined
with hollow promises or promises made *in extremis*, not out of conviction but to save their political
skins. Additionally, industrial claims that had only days before been described as 'unacceptable' –
for example, the bus drivers – were succumbed to, so that they could try to bag some extra votes.

525 In what now has become clear was yet another tactic deployed to their electoral advantage,
they successfully obstructed the emergence of a series of Principal Auditor's Reports pre-election
by delaying necessary legislation for years. This would clearly have further damaged their
credentials and can only have been deliberate. As the Principal Auditor himself says, in the very
delayed report for the years 2016-18, which he could only publish this January, the fact that
530 supplementary appropriation legislation is not expeditiously taken by the Government delays the
conclusion of the work and makes it impossible for him to report to this House on financial
transactions. This is a deliberate blockage of accountability, which we call out and hope will not
be repeated.

535 After the election there has been a trend of tripling down on the misinformation, combined
with deficits in financial and democratic governance, a state of what I call a governance crisis. That
2023 closest election ever delivered an unprecedented parliamentary dynamic under the 2006
Constitution. Gibraltar was divided almost 50:50 and only the thinnest of margins saved a tired
Government from being shown the door. The Government replaced some Ministers but, a lot of
people may think, little else. The dominant ideas are still driven by antiquated repackaging of old
540 mantras, heavily charged with opaqueness, fuelled by a cocktail of misinformation and hollow
pledges to change their ways and that they have learned lessons of the past. Far from it. The new
dawn is looking rather jaded now. They are swapping, in our view, the new dawn for the new dusk
as they slowly edge towards the end, and in doing so they are tripling down on the misinformation
and compounding it with serious financial and democratic governance deficits.

545 Take, for example, the assertion of transparency and the web of companies, which has now
become a veritable jungle. Taxpayers' money is managed on sacred trust, for and on behalf of the
people. The people should be told how their money is spent and to what extent it is spent. These
notions are so basic that they almost should not need saying, but unfortunately, with this
Government it is essential to do so. Mr Picardo presides over the most secretive administration in
550 Gibraltar's history on the substance of where the money is, while pretending to be the most
transparent: again, more misinformation. With hundreds of millions of pounds off-book – more
than £1 billion – parked in a series of entities, it is absolutely impossible to judge how much money
is left or, indeed, our true financial health. That is not helped by 'a jungle of companies', using the
phrase coined by the Minister for Economic Development.

555 Within the last couple of financial years, hundreds of millions of pounds are also being directed
via a charity structure of which Community Supplies and Services forms part. That company, CSSL,
will use hundreds of millions in projects at Coaling Island or Laguna Estate; at least it is projected
to do so. This is a structure where it seems obvious that the Minister for Economic Development
is the guiding hand under the guise of his secretive National Economic Plan.

560 Several now traditional tactics from the Chief Minister's playbook are used to layer
smokescreens over these serious deficits of accountability. First, he points to the past, but
whenever has there been more than £1 billion in companies off-book for public purposes? The
post-election tripling down was just clear the other day. In a moment of heat to the head, he
boldly asserted that they were the most transparent Government ever. Moments later – I asked
565 him in relation to another question – he refused to inform the people how around £190 million is
being used by a wholly owned government company, or even give us a list of the companies
owned by the Government through the Gibraltar Development Corporation. Let's be clear, we
were not asking how that company, GEP, is using every last penny of the £190 million, although if
we did, the people of Gibraltar should be entitled to receive that information. All we were asking
570 for at that stage, on Friday, was to know what basic project this sum of money – a vast amount of
money, on any view – was being used for, or for what public purpose, and yet we got nothing,
with £190 million.

Government-owned companies do not exist at the whim of Ministers. They exist for public
purposes and the public are entitled to know what they are being used for, and what moneys
575 borrowed, loaned or transferred through them in their name are being used for. To refuse to give
us that information is a refusal to provide information to the people of Gibraltar. We are talking
about a sum close on £200 million. Even worse, following that answer was the statement that the
Government from now on would provide similar answers on 'future questions posed in respect of
any other financial arrangement of any other government company', and yet we are supposed to
580 believe they are the most transparent ever, when a lot of what happens happens off-book with
tens and hundreds of millions of pounds.

To go on to further suggest that this refusal to answer is based on the fact, as the Chief Minister
suggested the other day, that they were re-elected, almost as if the people had given them
immunity on their policy, simply mocks the electorate and sends the message that they will do
585 and continue to do whatever they want without real accountability to the people. What is the
point of going through the motions or pretence of accountability when those kinds of questions
are not answered or answered in that way? Being re-elected does not give them *carte blanche* to
do whatever they want without accountability to the people.

Today he said, almost in his opening remarks, that the nature of today's Budget debate, being
590 a State of the Nation, is about 'following the money'. He said, and I hope I took it accurately,
'Following the money shows you what the nation is doing or is capable of doing'. But that is
precisely the issue. If they do not tell us what they are doing with the hundreds of millions of
pounds organised via structures in the 'jungle', then they are hiding those facts from the people,
from the public, who have a right to know. For them to really be able to say they are being
595 transparent, they need to answer questions and provide substantive information, not just empty
paperwork devoid of real answers to those questions.

Madam Speaker, in January we saw the publication of the delayed Principal Auditor's Report. Apart from the blocking of accountability that was committed before the last election, that Report revealed a series of issues of doubtful awards of contracts, failures to follow proper tendering procedures, double-invoicing, waste of public moneys, rampant or excessive overtime or lack of oversight of public contracts. The themes running through specific transactions highlighted by auditors in their 900-page report showed abuses by individuals and companies, laxity of procedures and deep value for money concerns. As these matters had been revealed on a spot-check, it suggested that this was the tip of a financial iceberg, where much more should be done to control the use of public money and get real value for money for the taxpayer. As that report is now historic, we look forward to publication of more up-to-date reports for years after 2018. As I have already said, the Government had politically engineered a backlog and erected roadblocks preventing the Principal Auditor concluding these reports. We now hope, with the passage of most of the pending legislation a couple of months ago, that further reports will swiftly issue.

Cumulatively, the Principal Auditor's Report and the McGrail inquiry have further confirmed the need for big reforms of financial and democratic governance, but before I turn to that, in the meantime we have been served up the trailer of a promising new political drama, because the Chief Minister says he is going. Well, actually, it is a long goodbye, because he had to scotch speculation about his departure date recently in answer to GBC questions provoked by positionings among his replacements – and I am not talking about his phones. He told GBC, after all that speculation, that he would 'serve the term as Chief Minister and continue to put his name forward during this term', whatever that precisely means. It may mean that he is the incumbent for the whole term, or not. It is a matter for him, of course, and I express no view one way or the other.

Whatever happens on that side, it looks certain that we will witness the longest leadership election campaign in history, because it has already started. We already have at least two contenders and the actual vacancy may not arise for some time, so it may mean that the upstaging campaign of social media promotion or photo opportunities will long continue. We think we know who he is backing, although one never really knows with him. A struggle to replace the incumbent who once was a liberal but switched parties to become a socialist – some wags, not me, say, for political expedience: how dare they? – leaving the party of the person sitting to his right to join the party of the person sitting to his second left normally, a struggle, pitting his chosen successor for the throne against the rising star of old Labour. Will the next leader be someone who increasingly sounds like him, or will it be that someone who left and came back can prevail and lead the party? Someone who left, maybe following political manoeuvres by the now Chief Minister? Who knows? The protégé against the prodigal son of the old guard, or at least a prodigal sone of the old guard? It all has the hallmarks of a box-office Netflix series, an intrigue and drama, with the various contenders supported by their own leading lights of the party and no doubt vying for support from their brethren and sisterhood. Who will the progressive *jardinero* support in this political game of thrones –

Hon. D J Bossino: He may be a contender.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: – part fantasy, part reality, part pageant? I, for one, cannot wait for the episode when Rock maesters flies in, aloft and astride a fire-breathing dragon supporting one of the contenders, wearing the shiny blue tachuelas jacket, but that is for another day.

Against that backdrop of promised departure, we notice a new emerging argument deployed as a further smokescreen to continued excesses and misinformation. Hon. Members do not need to get so nervous because we are talking about leadership elections. I do not. It is now the Chief Minister's increasing recent tendency to say that because he is not standing again he has no political axe to grind, and that therefore, by implication, he is more believable or his motives more pure and should not be doubted, as if because he says he intends to go at some point it makes him a standard bearer for unimpeachable motives or provides a warranty of truth, light and

650 justice. As with a lot of things done by the Chief Minister and this Government, you have to look
beyond the catchy superficial one-liner and then imagine the reverse. So, in classic misinformation
style, the 'I have no axe to grind because I am not standing again', rather than being an assurance
of puritanical behaviour for the future, is the sounding of the starting gun for a closing-down sale
rampage style of politics, where everything goes in the last breaths of this Government, where
the Chief Minister does whatever he wants and with increasing recklessness or opacity.

655 What else could possibly explain the most recent turn of events where he says he is the most
transparent but will not give information on the use of hundreds of millions of your money, or
appoints a senior lawyer from his own law firm to chair the Police Authority, in brazen disregard
of evidence heard at the McGrail inquiry and perhaps even in open defiance of it before the closing
660 submissions? What else explains the passage of a law to change the Inquiries Act weeks before its
commencement, which gave the Government powers to do things in the inquiry that it did not
have before? The fact that that law has, so far, been used to limited effect in the inquiry we
suspect is simply because of the noise and public clamour of surprise and rejection that that move
drew, rather than from any pure motives held by the Government. Why else would you need such
a wide-ranging law, introduced without consultation with the chairman? As we explained at the
665 time, the introduction of that legislation by core participants in the inquiry without the agreement,
still less consultation, of the chairman himself, raised very serious issues of governance. With all
due respect to the former Governor, who, in remarks before his departure, sought to downplay
its importance – we think in an inappropriate, politically partisan way, given the issues of high and
serious political controversy – the fact that we heard little about the Act during the weeks that
670 followed is because the Government thought again about the use of wider powers and, we think,
undoubtedly because of political pressure, public scrutiny and the interest of the media on the
developing events. We hope that situation will continue. They will never admit it, but they thought
again, the same way they thought again about a measure I will speak about a bit later.

In further misinformation, and this time plain fabrication, all that the Chief Minister could say
675 at the time was that the GSD had asked for direct rule from the UK, when we had specifically
recorded in correspondence with the Governor the opposite, that we were not seeking to have
an assent conversation with him, respectful of the constitutional boundaries. But in his usual way,
why let the facts get in the way of a convenient, yet false, narrative?

We have now heard weeks of evidence in the McGrail inquiry and the closing arguments. As
680 has been made clear by the chairman, he will take some time to deliver a report on the matters
he has been asked to look at, and we will await that report. I have to say that stunning aspects
have emerged in the evidence that raise issues beyond the issues which the chairman has been
asked to look at. We will comment on these and other features in due course.

We note from closing arguments of counsel to the inquiry that a number of pregnant questions
685 remain about the absence of the Chief Minister's WhatsApp messages to the senior partner of
Hassans after September 2019 and that the inquiry is seeking explanations on that. That this is
still ongoing after closing arguments is, in itself, surprising, it seems to us.

For our part, what has emerged in the inquiry already has confirmed the view that we have
been setting out for some time, that there has to be radical reform to enshrine better checks and
690 balances on executive power or to ensure that conflicts of interest are better regulated. The
evidence indicates a festering swamp of conflicts which corrode our democracy and spoke
volumes of the attitude of the Chief Minister towards those issues.

The brazen attitude of a Government that thinks it is okay to appoint as Chairman of the Police
Authority a senior lawyer from the same law firm of the Chief Minister and the, for now, two
695 potential GSLP successors when this Authority and the influence of the Chief Minister over it has
been at the heart of the inquiry, is an indicator that this GSLP Government will never acknowledge,
still less enact, real reform in this area.

That in the slipstream of all this, the political newspaper owned by the GSLP is not just doing a
self-serving loaded serialisation version of events but recently turned to open a guerrilla warfare
700 campaign on the current Commissioner of Police is simply perverse. The serialised inquiry articles

already had all the hallmarks of being influenced, authored or based on information provided by the Chief Minister. They were written far too well. That newspaper is controlled by the GSLP and the GSLP Chief Minister. For it and him to be sanctioning a course of action like that on the current Commissioner of Police simply shows how deep the institutional problems go.

705 Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister has of late – not this morning, but of late – seemed bitter and angry. I just mention that as an observation. Anyone would think he had lost the election. I know he does not like the things that we say, but in his colder moments he may reflect that a lot of what we say is reactive to things they do, that he does or says, because that is the nature of
710 Opposition politics. Sometimes you make big policy announcements, but a lot of the time you are reacting to the government of the day on the things that are done and the failings, so when we are critical, it is because invariably there is something they have done. I make no apologies for raising issues, because that is what we are supposed to do. We are not here to give them a free ride or an easy one. That is the nature of adversarial politics. They are hardly novices at it, nor were they some kind of Opposition vestal virgins.

715 Sir Joe Bossano mounted a relentless political guerrilla campaign against Sir Joshua Hassan, and then Peter Caruana. When he handed the baton to the Chief Minister, Mr Picardo, he also became a relentless pursuer of the Caruana Government. He had already been an attack dog in opposition – I say that as a compliment, by the way – and, as leader, continued that and doubled
720 down on it. His attacks spanned a broad range of subjects, to the point that the then Chief Minister, Peter Caruana, described him as unfit to be Chief Minister because of the ‘deceit to which he sees fit to resort as a matter of personal style and instinct’. Things must have really looked grave for Mr Picardo when he had to wheel out Sir Peter, who once thought him unfit for office because of his instinct of deceit, to defend him in the McGrail inquiry. But that is an aside from the main point I wanted to make. The issue is that when he stood up in Parliament just the
725 other day on his quasi point of order – intervening in the middle of Question Time to give us all a lecture about how politics should be conducted and how he would have so much more to say – this was nothing more than old-style misinformation from his playbook of deceit. It was the fakery of purity to mask the reality of sin, the fake outrage of victimhood when he is the principal aggressor; the sheer gall of taking that stance, airbrushing history away as if he is the altar boy of politics. I am not sure if he was doing that in a bid to persuade a new Speaker, who has perhaps
730 not seen his Budget antics live in the House, that he had no history, but surely even he understands that we all live in a small community and that his reputation precedes him, and that the political tactics of Members opposite are well known. What he cannot do with any semblance of credibility is don the cloth of the saint and lecture us on a pure form of politics when he has trodden the
735 path of political sin and has been the prime advocate of war and not peace, negative and not constructive politics.

Whenever we try constructive politics, it has been greeted with negative politics, with a façade of superficial platitudes which then see no delivery, and, worse still, we are greeted with lashings out, which are the reverse of what he says he stands for. I am sure he feels the same way and I
740 am sure he will say that. This was never really a new dawn in that sense of constructive politics. No, an old dog does not change. It was an extension of how they did things between 1988 and 1996 and a doubling down of it; more sophisticated, better conducted, but raw politics. Now he pretends, and will pretend some more later in his reply, to be outraged by the robust opposition or by the odd word here or there, when he is capable of much deeper criticism.

745 He complains about populism when he is the supreme populist and has been for years. He is, with respect to him, drowning in his own contradictions, and these are all, by the way, political points about his philosophy in a political Chamber. To start making an analysis as to why there should not be so-called attacks, or to characterise them as unworthy when he did exactly the same things before, or tell us how we should do opposition politics as he did the other day is to invite
750 us to go down a rabbit hole. We refuse to go down a rabbit hole with him. It is also an irony and a contradiction, given everything he has done before. To apply those theories to the Opposition but not the Government is as weird as it would be perverse. It would denude this Chamber of the

political arena of its purpose. But maybe that is what he wants, a free pass in his political twilight so he can do whatever he wants.

755 Holding the Government to account means precisely that. How it is done is for the Opposition of the day as much as it is for the Government of the day to decide how it governs and conducts itself. We think that they are not examples of how to govern, in the same way as they are not examples of how to do opposition. I am sure they have their own judgement of us, but if we are going to look at our robust politics, then let's not pretend they do not have a track record either.
760 For example, I can safely predict that the Father of the House, when he comes, will reply to my speech of last year, not this year. He always does. He is in his own little private time warp with me. I cannot wait to go back to 2023 with him later. The Chief Minister, who just the other day donned the toga of the saints, or the Greek political theologian – whichever you prefer – chastising us on how democracy should be conducted in accordance with higher positive values, will, in his
765 reply, conduct a personalised and sometimes vicious personal attack on each and every Member of the Opposition. He does it every year. Maybe it will be different this year. He will say that my performance was not as great as my predecessor's, but he used to say that about my predecessor too, only then to exalt him when he had gone. He will accuse us of being conservative, some more than others, and generally be highly negative and at times completely over the top with his
770 comments. By the time he finishes, Madam Speaker, you may think that the gentleman does protest too much, that in fact he is the standard bearer for negative attack politics rather than the glorious shining light of positivity in this glorious new dawn.

The more the Chief Minister says that things are going to change, the more they stay the same. You may also think that, in itself, is classic misinformation style, and so every time that he says
775 lessons have been learnt, what follows is – sometimes immediately, sometimes within a short period – more of the same. The raw choice is not actually ideological, however hard the Chief Minister tries to twist facts to his narrative to pretend it is. The real raw choice is between reality and misinformation, because his Government have, for many years now, done precisely that: twisted the facts, spun the truth, rolled out half-truths and, sometimes, downright inaccuracies.
780 They have prospered and festered in a culture of misinformation and opaqueness.

The problem is that the audience is captive, because it is perfectly understandable that when a Minister of the Crown speaks, the listener or the viewer will have a predisposition to think that they are always getting facts and information. It has taken a long time for people to start seeing through all this.

785 The misinformation started early in the glorious new dawn and are too many to mention throughout the last 13 years. I have already mentioned their obviously failed, and perhaps never really meant, promise to halve the then £500 million public debt of 2011. That misinformation subsequently has been endemic over many fields, sometimes coming in the form of half-truths, and sometimes downright inaccuracies. The suggestion that somehow I supported an Andorra
790 deal for Gibraltar when I had specifically said the opposite on a video with Mr Picardo in 2011, when he is seen to be nodding in agreement with me when I am speaking; or the implicit accusation he made, during the leader's debate the night before the election, that I was going to give Mr McGrail a job, when I had not even spoken to him in years, were just two of the more recent wild moments.

795 Many – I do not want to personalise it – individuals or bodies have had their own experiences, too. Who could forget the chants of 'No more lies' by frustrated teachers? Those chants, that the Chief Minister mocked at the time, spoke for themselves. If there is someone who cannot handle the truth, it is him, because it is often foreign to him and too hot in his hands. Like the boy who cried wolf, we now never quite know anymore.

800 In misinformation style, I safely predict he will accuse us of misinformation. He will reverse it all. He will pretend we are the ones misinforming. He will point to the past, like he always does. That is all about spurring confusion, by the way, but that exercise is as facile as it is a smokescreen. Ultimately, he stands on his own record as Chief Minister over the last 13 years. When I criticise the GSLP before 1996, it is a criticism of Sir Joe Bossano, who was in charge and was Chief Minister.

805 As much as he criticises the GSD of the past, the reality is that I was not Chief Minister and did not
have the power to drive policy in central areas, and most of the Members on this side were not
even in this House. I did not have the power to drive policy on financial issues; it is clear. I have
also not shirked from saying often enough that I had disagreed with how certain things were done
810 in the past. But he has actually been in charge since 2011 as Chief Minister, with the power to set
and drive policy, so what is his excuse for not really doing things differently? Is it really his best
point to keep harping on about the past rather than point to how he will be a reformer and be
different? There was a time when the hon. Member used to aspire to basking in the cleansing light
of being different. Now his implication, as he gazes to the past, is that his best defence somehow
815 is that he is not as dark as some of the past. Even that we do not accept as a matter of raw and
cold analysis, given the serious nature of the democratic and financial deficit that he presides over
and is unwilling to change.

For all those reasons, and those that will be set out by my colleagues, we cannot support this
unrealistic Appropriation Bill, built on continuing opaqueness and an approach to public finances
that we simply do not share and would want to radically change. It is a Bill supported by Estimates
820 that were unrealistic last year and have been confirmed this year, as we predicted, a hopeless
fiction. The Estimates for this year are equally unrealistic in some respects, as I have outlined in
detail.

This is a Government that says one thing and does another. It has parked hundreds of millions
of pounds off book without telling us what is being done or what is left. You cannot follow the
825 money if you cannot see the money or know what is being done with the money. The examples
mount up, and, as recently as Friday, they refuse to say what they are doing with transfers of
money involving hundreds of millions.

Madam Speaker, stable management of our public finances is key to deal with social and
economic policy, but if public finances are in disarray, then it is much harder to address social
830 objectives or reposition our economy and workers. Businesses and families suffer, in this
environment of much higher basic prices on things like food, without greater money in the pocket
because of government inefficiencies. The last few years have seen higher taxes, fees and charges
when people have been suffering with frozen wages in the public sector – small rises, if they were
lucky, in the private sector – eroding purchasing power, higher mortgages and greater economic
835 pressure.

Of course, faced with the combination of massive debt and an inability to control or meet its
own budgets, the Government has no financial leeway and can only resort to asking the people to
bail it out financially, as it has done previously. Despite the pretence, in the pre-electoral year, of
a financial recovery, the higher revenue was not due to sophisticated planning, discipline or
840 diversification, but rather by the blunt instrument of raw taxation taking money from people to
fund a Government unable to keep its promises of discipline.

In 2021, the Government made penal Social Insurance increases of between 20% and 107%,
affecting recovering businesses and workers. Electricity charges were also increased in 2021, 20%
for commercial electricity and 16% for home consumers. In 2022, there were further increases of
845 8% in electricity and water charges. Over those two years, a 24% increase in electricity.
Additionally, there was an increase of Income Tax by 2% in 2022, which was then reduced by 1%
last year on certain incomes. All of that happened against the backdrop of a Government not
keeping to its departmental budgets because they were unrealistic, could not be believed, or
because they did not have the discipline to control their own expenditure. This means that there
850 is less money, less relief for families, workers and business. We are far removed from a return to
financial stability.

As I have indicated previously, budget measures constructed in this public finances climate
need to take account of the real state of our finances, the macropolitical context and the
continued uncertainty that our economy is facing when we still do not know if it will be possible
855 to conclude a safe and beneficial agreement with the EU. That is what I have said before and it is
striking that the Chief Minister now appears to be using the same language, even though there

are aspects of his contribution that we do not share – for example, his pronounced recovery or return to financial stability.

860 The priorities continue, or should, to focus on the vulnerable, families in need, the lower paid and the elderly, as well as ensuring that our business sector remains competitive and is not shackled by unnecessary bureaucracy. This, and the financial services, tourism, ports, gaming and technology sectors need to be freed to be the engines of growth and recovery to boost productivity. There has to be thoughtful economic and financial planning for sustained growth in various sectors, rather than short-term thinking. Bold decisions need to be taken in that context, 865 even if they are unpopular, if we are to deal with historic issues. In parallel, the Government needs to show real discipline in its own finances and properly ensure value for money for the taxpayer. Anything less is unacceptable.

And so, I turn to the Budget measures that were announced this year, which, in our view, fall short of any great thinking; at least it is not obvious that they are constructed with that in mind. 870 Where is the discernible plan on these measures, which just seem another mixed bag of issues with no real coherence?

In accordance with our view that the vulnerable and those on lower incomes should be assisted and shielded from the worst effects of the cost-of-living issues over the last few years and wage pressures, we support the increases in Minimum Wage, pensions, disability benefit and sponsored 875 patient allowances by the cost of inflation.

The restoration of Income Tax at 25% had been promised last year, so is unsurprising. The Chief Minister has not given any indication of whether the projections of Income Tax in the Estimates take this into account or whether the loss in possible revenue is not taken into account in the figures. Perhaps in his reply – or perhaps the Minister for Taxation can clarify – he can let us know 880 what the projected cost of this reduction is expected to be and whether it is factored in already. The GSD in government lowered Income Tax substantially from a top rate of tax of 49% to 25%, so all this does is restore what the GSD had done.

The Corporate Tax rate increase is more surprising because it had not been trailblazed last year, and again perhaps the Chief Minister, in his reply, or the Minister for Tax can confirm whether any effect in greater revenue is taken into account in the projected estimates, and how much 885 additional revenue is intended to be generated here. Additionally, the Minister for Tax could perhaps inform the House whether there has been consultation with industry, financial services providers and business on these measures. We are concerned that any measure like this can threaten the commitment of some players to Gibraltar, who will make highly mobile decisions. 890 This can threaten tax revenue or jobs. Given the concern expressed about Brexit uncertainty, the imposition of such a measure now may tip certain players over in the wrong direction when it comes to taking strategic decisions as to the future. We are, therefore, extremely sceptical on such a measure now. Against the backdrop that there appears to be no other measure at all in the list announced that in any way is an incentive to business, such a decision can be very misguided 895 at this time when stability is important. It seems to us that sight has been lost of ensuring that Gibraltar retains that fiscal competitive edge.

Madam Speaker, I repeat what I said earlier about what we call the so-called cash handouts, the support payments in the public sector. These disappointed both public and private sector workers last year. This year, there will be a continuation of this practice for another year. As I said 900 last year and repeated earlier, this means that at a time of little financial leeway, families in the private sector with household incomes of less than £50,000 are seeing their hard-earned taxpayers' money go to civil servants who may, jointly in a household, have incomes in excess of £190,000. As we said last year, this measure is not targeted for the low paid. If there was spare cash to distribute, then it should have been possible to construct and target payments to those 905 on lower incomes in the public sector.

The increases in fees and charges will penalise everybody, especially the business sector and ordinary workers. The business sector sees almost nothing from this Budget. Hand in hand with that will also be the inflationary increase on electricity and water of over 2%, which combined

910 with previous increases in recent years mean that these have been increased by 26% since 2011, so an ordinary family will have seen 26% increases at the time of a cost-of-living crisis, food price hike and very little movement in their wages – an erosion of their wages, in actual fact.

915 I am going to turn to the levy of £10 per week on vehicles over 10 years, which the Chief Minister, just before I spoke, said that they were going to withdraw, but did so in terms that suggested they were going to consult. Therefore, I make my remarks to leave our position very clear, because we do not believe that that measure should go anywhere at all; that it should be declared dead and not go to consultation. Our view is that the announced new levy of £10 per week on vehicles over 10 years amounted to a new and significant tax of £520 per year. This move was far more likely to penalise those on lower incomes than anyone else. It is more likely that families on modest incomes will have older vehicles and may have less financial flexibility to change or buy a new vehicle. If the move is also meant to push people to change their older vehicles, it would not do so, but still burden people with a massive new tax. It will not do so if people simply do not have the money. Lower income people cannot buy a car just like that.

920 This new tax, which was unannounced, was as much a surprise as the short-lived brainwave that was the tax on companies that never saw the light of day and effectively died in 48 hours. We think the introduction of this older-vehicle tax was ill thought through and provides no apparent flexibility in its rollout. The Chief Minister got up and said, ‘By the way, there are going to be all these exemptions and flexibilities.’ He did not say that when he made his original contribution, so is this a lunchtime brainwave to put a patch on the wound? What about pensioners or ordinary families with old cars, who are basically extracting value for money from old vehicles by making them last? You do not have a lot of money to buy a new car, so you make them last. This would be penal and unfair on the low-income people, people with a modest income.

930 I make clear we do not support this measure. We think this measure should be withdrawn unequivocally and not go to consultation. The Chief Minister may be able to keep an old car – a Porsche – but working families just do not have the means, and this is an unfair penalty on those lower-income families.

935 I did not hear the Chief Minister say that student grants would be adjusted; I certainly cannot recall it. I did not see it in my notes that the student grants would be adjusted with inflation, so perhaps in his reply ... After we trawl again through his speech, if it is not there, perhaps he would clarify whether that was something that was omitted, as that would affect hundreds of families and students.

940 If additional revenue streams can be generated by duty on mild hybrid vehicles or hybrids, then that is something we would support, as well as the regulation of short-term holiday lets. My colleague the Shadow Finance Minister may pick up Opposition comment on other measures that I may not have specifically responded to in this overview and he may wish to address.

945 All in all, the burden of this Budget is on tax increase, not tax decrease. Apart from the restoration of Income Tax at 25%, many other measures lead to tax increases or new taxes in a regressive, not progressive, way, penalising the people on lower incomes more.

Madam Speaker, in my closing remarks may I return to George Orwell, who I know the Chief Minister likes. He observed:

If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.

950 Difficult as the message may be to Members opposite, let me make it clear: after the election, all we have is what we had before but worse: a GSLP Government that has now become a caricature of itself, promising big but delivering small. The strikingly dominant aspect of the reputation it has built for itself is of an inability to tell it how it is and honestly or realistically report on the state of facts, be it in public finances or other aspects of our domestic affairs. It is now a Government that cannot be believed, or that it is hard to believe. People rightly view the GSLP Government with huge scepticism when they provide information. This is a self-created legacy and flaw over the last 12 years. They have only themselves to blame, having repeatedly, over so

many years, not given the public the clean facts as they are. It is obvious that everything I have said about last year's hopeless fiction of a Budget and the criticisms of this year's Budget mean that we do not believe that the public finances are being handled sustainably, responsibly, with discipline or sufficient value for money. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, I have been elected as a Member of this House for a period which has spanned 26 Budgets, 13 as a Member of the Government and 13 as a Member of the Opposition. In February, it was, therefore, an honour to mark 25 consecutive years as a Member of this House, a quarter of a century. This provides a unique sense, perhaps, of context and perspective, and after some of what we have heard today from the Leader of the Opposition I feel bound to appeal, too, for moderation and respect: respect for Members and as Members of this House, respect for the outcome of the last General Election, and respect for the electorate as a whole. It is seldom wise to belittle or be seen to undermine the democratic process, or indeed to behave as if we were still in a general election campaign, so I would urge hon. Members to take care how they pitch it. This should be a contest of ideas. Of course, constructive criticism is healthy in any democracy, and it is true that in our adversarial system it falls upon them to hold the Government to account, but my point is that there are ways of doing this. I am sure my hon. Friend the Chief Minister will have more to say at the end of the debate.

Madam Speaker, the expenditure of the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister for the financial year 2023-24 at Head 15 has come in at £2.4 million. That includes Gibraltar House in London and Gibraltar House in Brussels, which together accounted for over half of the Budget figure. The overall expenditure is less than the estimate of £2.8 million which was approved by this Parliament last year. It therefore represents a saving of some £400,000. As part of that, Gibraltar House in London and Gibraltar House in Brussels have reported savings of £80,000 and £90,000 respectively. This Parliament is now being asked to approve a further £2.35 million for the new financial year. That comes to £26,000 less than the forecast outturn for the year, which closed at the end of March.

These overall Estimates come in the context of the uncertainty generated as to whether or not Gibraltar will end up with a treaty to govern our future relationship with the European Union. That situation was thrust upon us by the outcome of the 2016 referendum; a referendum which we did not ask for, which led to consequences that we do not support. But in government you have to get on with it, you need to take the good with the bad, and that is exactly what this Government has done.

Today, 2016 may seem an eternity ago, and I am sure many would have preferred the security afforded by a new treaty much sooner, but as the House knows, the process was impacted by a series of cumulative external delays. First, it took the UK nine months to trigger Article 50. Then, almost the entirety of 2019 was taken up with problems in the UK Parliament over the ratification of the Withdrawal Agreement. After the 2020 New Year's Eve Agreement, it took the EU 10 months to accept and agree the new negotiating mandate, in October 2021. The Spanish general election last year delayed the negotiations by a further five months, then the European election, and now, the final hurdle, the UK itself embarks on its own electoral process, which will be determined later this week. The cumulative effect of all this alone is some 36 months, three years, and this does not take into account the impact of the pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, both of which, understandably, diverted attention and reduced bandwidth.

In spite of all this, and whatever may happen, the Government has delivered at every stage of the Brexit process: we protected the bilateral relationship with the United Kingdom; we secured a series of bridging measures to cushion the impact of a hard Brexit; we negotiated our inclusion in the Withdrawal Agreement to provide for an orderly departure; and we concluded a political agreement which set the route map for a future relationship treaty. Of course, some of this reflects the actual complexity of the negotiation, its uniqueness, its multifaceted content, its well-

1010 known sensitivity in a number of areas, and the need to hold the line and defend our well-known
traditional position. The House knows there are some lines we are simply not prepared to cross.
If we had crossed those lines and said yes to everything, then we would have had a treaty years
ago, but we have not done that and we are not going to do that. Now, 19 rounds and two political
summits later, we are closer, as my hon. Friend the Chief Minister has said, but not quite there
1015 yet.

It is relevant here to highlight the involvement of Gibraltar, its Chief Minister and its
Government at every stage of this process. This was reflected most clearly in the two quadrilateral
meetings at the Berlaymont, the home of the European Commission in Brussels. There were
clearly four delegations, four delegation meeting rooms and four sides on the top table. Indeed,
1020 these negotiations have been known for the flexible and variable geometry from the very outset.
We have made it clear that meetings have taken place between different parties in different
places over the course of the years. The United Kingdom and the European Union are the intended
signatories of the treaty, but Gibraltar and Spain are the two most impacted sides.

EU processes, too, may delay the final steps of a potential treaty. The recent elections to the
1025 European Parliament have set a chain of events in motion. This will lead to the confirmation of a
new College of Commissioners in the autumn. The new political groups are expected to be
constituted by the middle of this month. A formally recognised group must consist of at least 23
MEPs from seven member states. The largest will again be the European People's Party, which will
include Spanish MEPs from the Partido Popular. Hon. Members will know that the horse-trading
1030 has already commenced. The procedure is that the Council will propose a candidate for
Commission President to the European Parliament. This will be outgoing President von der Leyen.
The investiture session is expected after the summer. The candidate for Commission President
will need 361 votes in the European Parliament in order to secure ratification. The calendar
suggests that the confirmation hearings for designate commissioners will take place in October or
1035 November.

Absent this top political layer, technical work on a Gibraltar treaty has continued, but it is
obvious that executive decisions can only be taken by the incoming Commission and not by the
outgoing one. The negotiations so far have been conducted by the Secretariat-General, which has
reported to its Executive Vice-President, Maroš Šefčovič. Šefčovič has served as a commissioner
1040 appointed by Slovakia since 2009. As part of the EU ratification process, the new elected European
Parliament will have to consent to any Gibraltar treaty. Two of its committees will be responsible
for driving this consent procedure. These are the Committee on International Trade and the
Committee on Foreign Affairs. The membership of these reconstituted committees will be
particularly important to Gibraltar. This is because the first discussions on votes will take place
1045 there. Later, the debate will move to the full plenary, when the Gibraltar reports of these two
committees will be discussed and voted upon.

Clearly, the overall composition of the full European Parliament itself will be crucial too: 720
MEPs representing 27 member states will have the view. As the House knows, there has been a
swing to the right in many European countries, and the distribution of MEPs among the different
1050 political groups will be particularly relevant. The advice to the Government is that the EU calendar
could have an impact on the timing of a Gibraltar treaty, both the conclusion of it and then the
subsequent ratification. Needless to say, while there is no agreed outcome, the possibility remains
of no treaty at all.

Hon. Members will be aware of the work to prepare for a no negotiated outcome, also known
1055 as NNO. No doubt Gibraltar is better prepared today than we were in 2017, but the Government
has made it clear on countless occasions that it is impossible to mitigate all the consequences of
no treaty. This is particularly so in areas which are outside our control and outside the control of
the United Kingdom. The truth is that without a treaty, life with the European Union will feel very
different. Gibraltar will be subject to processes and procedures which will be more cumbersome,
1060 more bureaucratic and more time consuming. We have already witnessed some of these in play.

No treaty does not mean that we can simply continue as we are. That is not possible. Let me be clear: if there is no treaty, the status quo is not an option.

1065 The Government has taken this NNO work forward under the civil contingency structure through the Brexit Strategic Group, which I chair. That group met last week. The interface with the United Kingdom is via the NNO Board. I have co-chaired this over the years, together with the serving UK Minister with responsibility for Gibraltar. This board also met last week. It met at a ministerial level for the last time in May with then UK Overseas Territories Minister David Rutley MP co-chairing. Members of the Gibraltar Cabinet were briefed on NNO on the 19th of this month. I want to thank the many UK government ministers and officials who have worked with Gibraltar on contingency planning over the years. I am also very grateful to those who remain involved in the process.

1075 Part of the United Kingdom contribution has entailed co-funding a number of NNO projects in Gibraltar. This has included the waste equipment plant, a shredder, compactor, baler and wrapper. It has also covered the Algeciras ferry operation and the construction of a ferry ramp which preceded this. The upgrades to the container port to increase the resilience of Gibraltar were also part of this workstream. The UK supported a hotel assistance scheme to accommodate emergency health workers who live in Spain. There are also plans to increase fluidity of the land border through the installation and use of e-gates in the event of no treaty.

1080 The Government has also engaged directly with the private sector in its contingency planning. A number of briefings have been delivered to the Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Gibraltar Betting and Gaming Association and the Finance Centre Council. The Government is grateful that this was acknowledge recently at the GFSB annual dinner. In November, those representative bodies were invited to participate in an NNO tabletop exercise. This was organised by the Civil Contingency Department. It also included the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence. This year, those same organisations have been invited to hold their own exercise for their own membership, with the assistance of the Government. The GFSB did so on 10th April and the GBGA on 15th April. There have been six tabletop exercises so far. These are focused on the consequences of no treaty on day one and the consequences of no treaty on day 30. It is obvious that different sectors would be impacted by this in different ways. One of the most significant issues will be the access of Frontier workers through the border. Another will be the movement of goods, along with wider issues of transport and road haulage. Many of these issues have been highlighted in two booklets and in some 50 technical notices which have been published so far. These remain available on the Brexit section of the Government website.

1095 It is important to make the point once again that no treaty does not equate to the status quo. Gibraltar cannot remain as it is today. Instead, it will need to transition to the consequences of a new reality of life outside the European Union. So, the consequences of NNO must feature in any analysis of any potential treaty.

1100 Gibraltar has, so far, been shielded from the full impact of Brexit. This has been cushioned by a series of voluntary bridging measures unilaterally extended by Spain. They have covered areas like commercial road transport, reciprocal healthcare and ambulances. Some of those original measures have now lapsed. However, even that gradual disapplication has been helpful in providing time for Gibraltar to adapt. The most important of those measures continues to be the suspension of the Schengen Borders Code. In practice, this has meant an exemption from the stamping of passports. This applied when originally introduced to residents of Gibraltar in general. It was subsequently narrowed down to benefit resident red card holders only and made subject to geographical constraints. But there is no doubt that an abrupt exit from the European Union absent all those temporary measures would not have been easy. Equally, Gibraltar will be subject to the full impact of Brexit in the event of no treaty. My colleague the Chief Minister has already indicated that reciprocal action at the border will be the policy of the Government in this area.

1110 In addition to this matter, the House should note that the new EU Entry/Exit System, known as the EES, is expected to become operational in the autumn. This will replace physical stamping of

1115 passports with electronic stamps. It is a Schengen-wide measure which has come into force at every entry point. However, it will be a requirement to register first in order to be able to use the system. This will involve travellers going into a booth and recording their biometrics, including a facial scan and fingerprints. That registration will take time. It is expected to generate considerable delays. There are serious concerns, too, in Dover and at St Pancras. The Eurostar terminal there is being expanded with booths and electronic gates in order to make provision to cope with the new system. Here, in Gibraltar, we are no stranger to border queues and delays, although the theory is that after first registration, crossing an external border of Schengen should become a smoother experience for the traveller.

1120 The EES will come hand in hand with the EU's Travel Information and Authorisation System, known as ETIAS, although they are two separate initiatives. This applies to visa-exempt nationals, including British citizens. The principle is similar to the ESTA preclearance regime for travel to the United States. The fee is expected to be €7 and an ETIAS will last for three years. Applicants under the age of 18 or over the age of 70 will not have to pay the fee. This system is expected to enter into force in 2025.

1130 The point needs to be made that the rollout of both the EES and ETIAS have been marked themselves by delay after delay, but the initiatives spell out very clearly the direction of travel for those, like us, outside the European Union. In the event of no negotiated outcome, most people in Gibraltar would be subject to both the EES regime and the ETIAS regime, so things will change. It is worth noting, though, that in July 2021 the published Draft Negotiating Mandate of the European Commission for a Gibraltar Treaty proposed the exemption of Gibraltar residents from both these measures.

1135 Madam Speaker, I want to thank the many officials in Gibraltar who have been involved in NNO work for many years now. In particular, I want to thank the Director of Civil Contingencies, Ivor Lopez; my principal secretary, Ernest Francis; the Chief Scientist of the Department of the Environment, Liesl Mesilio; and the Director of Gibraltar House in Brussels, Daniel D'Amato.

1140 I now turn to report precisely on our office in Brussels. It seems like yesterday the Government opened the new expanded premises at 17 Square Ambiorix, but in fact it opened its doors almost a decade ago, nine years ago this year. Those nine years have coincided with the most destructive time ever seen in Gibraltar's relationship with the European Union. However, the UK's decision to leave the EU also presented us with the opportunity to work together with both like never before. The Brussels office has supported and accompanied the Government throughout the transition of our relationship with the EU. This has evolved from membership to withdrawal to now seeking to establish a new future relationship with it. Gibraltar House in Brussels continues to be a source of expertise and support as we defend our interests in the heart of the European Union. It is also a platform from which to engage a network with the EU institutions and with the wider diplomatic core which gravitates around them. Our assets there have been and remain Gibraltar's very own eyes and ears in Brussels.

1145 The role of Gibraltar House in the treaty negotiation continues to be vital and constant throughout. Indeed, it could be argued that its contribution over the last 12 months has been its most important yet. The intensification of negotiations has led to increased engagement with Brussels. This has taken the form of formal meetings, official rounds, technical sessions and informal contact. The office has supported all this. Director Daniel D'Amato has been present in formal rounds, alongside the Attorney General, Michael Llamas. The office was also key in the organisation and the logistics behind the historic ministerial meeting of 12th April. This was attended by the Chief Minister and me, alongside Foreign Secretary Lord Cameron, with Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares and Commission Vice President Maroš Šefčovič. Gibraltar House was also involved in the second high-level quadrilateral meeting, which took place in Brussels on Thursday, 16th May.

1155 The actual location of the office itself is also helpful. It lies close to the Commission headquarters and near to the UK Mission to the EU. This makes it the ideal base for ministerial visits and visits from government officials. The Government's home away from home continues,

1165 in many ways, to prove to be an asset. This we knew at the time we acquired it, although
admittedly we had no idea then of the magnitude of the challenges which were to come.

Madam Speaker, a few words now on the topic of visits to Brussels. I had the opportunity to
visit on official business in January, April and May of this year. The main purpose behind the
1170 January visit was to participate in the European Committee of the Regions UK Contact Group. This
is a forum I have attended faithfully since its inception in 2019. It provides the opportunity for
Gibraltar, together with the nations of the UK family, to conduct direct dialogue with the EU
institutions. For a while it was the only forum of interaction between politicians from both sides
of the Channel, until the UK EU Parliamentary Partnership Assembly came into being. I have used
1175 the opportunity afforded by these meetings to brief stakeholders on the challenges that Brexit
poses for Gibraltar. It is also important to lay out our objectives in the negotiations. On this last
occasion I stressed the Government's commitment to reaching a negotiated outcome which
would allow for the fluid movement of persons and goods. That message was warmly received.
The institution represents the European regions, and the value of regional co-operation is
something the Committee of the Regions is very much alive to. However, I also used my
1180 intervention to warn that the objective of shared prosperity by any attempt to cross red lines.
That message, too, was received and understood. The feedback from participants of the contact
group has been one of support and encouragement for a negotiated outcome which will benefit
all sides.

A further word now on the subject of negotiated outcomes. I used my visit also to pay a
1185 courtesy call on the Ambassadors of San Marino and Andorra. The two microstates only in
December 2023 concluded treaty agreements of their own with the European Commission at
negotiator level. This process took them nearly nine years. It was illuminating and encouraging to
hear how two territories of a similar size, albeit very different dynamics to Gibraltar, have
managed to conclude an agreement with the European Union. It was also informative to hear how
1190 each jurisdiction was going about their own processes for respective implementation of the
agreed text and the further work which will need to go into that. I am, therefore, very pleased
with the relationship which our team have built up with them and others as a result of our
activities in Brussels.

During my visit I took the opportunity to brief key senior MEPs at the European Parliament
1195 who, with the help of Gibraltar House, have accrued a deep knowledge and interest in Gibraltar
matters. Meeting with MEPs who understand our issues is always welcome, but many are not on
this wavelength. Hon. Members will have seen how there are elements within the European
Parliament who have been profoundly unhelpful, to say the least. Indeed, some MEPs are and
have been openly hostile to Gibraltar. The House will rejoice that one of them, former Spanish
1200 Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo, has now retired as an MEP, but many others
remain.

Madam Speaker, I wish to expand slightly on the subject of Gibraltar's work with the European
Parliament, which is relevant to our treaty negotiations. A considerable amount of this
workstream takes place behind the scenes. The European Parliament as an institution is one that
1205 is growing in influence and importance within the European Union and internationally. It has
always been the mission of Gibraltar House in Brussels to understand the European Parliament
and, conversely, to have the Parliament better understand Gibraltar. It was part of our well-worn
pre-Brexit philosophy of taking Gibraltar to Europe and bringing Europe to Gibraltar.

The office holds meetings with MEPs, MEP staff and other Parliament officials in order to
1210 educate them all on issues affecting Gibraltar. We use facts to counter misinformation. Over the
years, Gibraltar House has been able to positively communicate matters related to Gibraltar to
the Parliament. There are many good news stories to tell in that regard; some of those stories we
cannot tell here, for obvious reasons. But unfortunately, sometimes the outcome is not so rosy.
There are certain individuals and political groups in the Parliament who have held and continue
1215 to hold an openly anti-Gibraltar agenda. The blunt truth is that since the loss of the 73 UK MEPs,
the political balance in the Parliament on support for Gibraltar has tilted towards Spain, and the

Spanish delegations dominate the different political groupings. It was always clear that this loss of UK influence would adversely affect Gibraltar, and we have seen this play out in a number of situations which have arisen over the last couple of years. Indeed, most recently the Government noted with disappointment the Parliament's decision to oppose the delisting of Gibraltar from the EU's AML/CFT grey list. That decision was engineered and taken without technical reasoning. It was loaded with the twisted political goals of anti-Gibraltar elements within the European Parliament, particularly within the Spanish right wing.

But, at the same time, it is important to note that other hostile initiatives have not seen the light of day. In such instances, years of lobbying and networking have proved useful. The *modus operandi* has been the same: intelligence was gathered quickly; contacts were notified rapidly and our team in Gibraltar House best responded to the threats. That response has taken different forms and it has included, where necessary, face-to-face meeting in Brussels, Strasbourg or elsewhere. Gibraltar's interests have benefited on several occasions from this discreet work behind the scenes. Hon. Members can rest assured that when the time comes, our team in Gibraltar House will always be ready to act, and they will act in order to ensure that the new European Parliament is kept fully informed about Gibraltar's position.

Gibraltar House will have its work cut out for the next year, come what may. First, it will have to adapt to the new political panorama in Brussels, given that all the EU institutions will have renewed leadership. Second, it will continue to support the Government in its mission to achieve a safe and secure treaty for Gibraltar. Third, whatever the outcome of the negotiations, Gibraltar House will assist with the implementation of a newly agreed treaty or, in the case of a non negotiated outcome, continue to fly the flag for Gibraltar in the heart of the European Union. I want to take this opportunity to thank Director Daniel D'Amato and the team in Brussels for their invaluable support.

I move on now to Gibraltar House in London. The financial year 2023-24 saw a continuation of Gibraltar's lobbying work both in Westminster and Whitehall. There was a pre-agreed focus to build a good working relationship with the Labour Party. It was significant, in that context, that the then Shadow Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, delivered a powerful and supportive video message for Gibraltar last National Day. This was unambiguous on our right to self-determination. Indeed, it foreshadowed the welcome commitment repeated in Labour's general election manifesto, and it signalled a move to solidify the strong cross-party stand of respect for the right of the people of Gibraltar to determine their own future.

The Government has also worked closely with Stephen Doughty MP, who served as Shadow Europe Minister with responsibility for Gibraltar in the UK parliamentary term just ended. The Chief Minister and I have had the opportunity to meet him, both in Gibraltar and in London. We are convinced that there is now a detailed understanding of the issues that Gibraltar faces going forward. I would like to place on record, too, the hard work of our representative in the UK, Dominique Searle, in this regard. This means that Labour is in a good place when it comes to Gibraltar. We could not have done more. At the same time, the Government has kept open our broad engagement on a traditional cross-party basis. This took the form of contact with the Conservative Party, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party and DUP. However, the general election in the UK will still prove to be a watershed moment for Gibraltar in many respects.

Some MPs who are friends of Gibraltar and many members of the APPG have stood down from politics. I wish to pay tribute to a few of them today: first and foremost, Sir Bob Neill, who worked tirelessly as APPG chair to keep No. 10 focused on Gibraltar issues and incessantly raised our concerns in Parliament. Gone also are Dame Rosie Winterton; Sir Graham Brady; Robin Walker, a former Brexit Minister who has spoken up for Gibraltar on many occasions; Henry Smith, a strong supporter and regular private visitor; Trudy Harrison, Environment Minister with responsibility for the Overseas Territories; Bob Stewart; Ben Wallace; Conor McGinn; Sir Robert Goodwill; Jon Cruddas and James Heapey; Lisa Cameron, who was highly involved in cryptocurrency work and developed a close rapport with Gibraltar's Finance Centre; also, Andrew Percy, MP for Goole, a city twinned with Gibraltar, who was out on the Rock some weeks ago. There are also MPs who

1270 changed their view about Gibraltar after a working visit here, or after taking a closer look at our policies in a particular area. Former Labour MP Margaret Hodge is a case in point. At the end, she held up the Gibraltar Finance Centre as an example for other Overseas Territories to follow.

On behalf of the Government, I want to express our thanks to all the MPs and peers who rallied to support us when needed. I wish those leaving Parliament all the very best for the future; Sir Bob Neill as APP chair and Labour MP Stephen Morgan as deputy chair until the UK general election was called. At that time, all APPGs dissolved. They will be reconstituted once the new Parliament opens and they decide who the new officers are going to be. Work will continue with the new cohort of MPs who come in after 4th July. The Government is clear that new faces will mean new friends.

1280 Attendance and representation at the key party conferences is an important part of the work of Gibraltar House in London. This creates the opportunity to network with key political figures. It ensures that Gibraltar remains in the focus of all the political parties. The General Election last year to some extent disrupted the programme of attendance at the traditional conferences in the autumn. The Government expects that schedule to return to normal later this year. This means that there will be a Gibraltar Government reception and stand at the main party conferences, as usual. These are the Liberal Democrat Party Conference in Brighton from 14th to 17th September, 1285 the Labour Party Conference in Liverpool from 22nd to 25th September, and the Conservative Conference in Birmingham from 29th September to 2nd October. The Government also plans to attend the SNP and DUP conferences, as we have done since the Brexit referendum. This programme will be an important part of the lobbying work of Gibraltar House in the months ahead.

1290 Madam Speaker, it is also important to highlight the support that Gibraltar, and indeed all the Overseas Territories, have enjoyed from the Speaker, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, and his office. This has included easing access for UK representatives into the Westminster estate. It also covered pushing for recognition of the Overseas Territories in key Commonwealth and UK national events around Parliament, including ceremonial occasions. Indeed, thanks to Mr Speaker's efforts, our flags and those of the Territories have flown in Parliament Square, outside the Palace of Westminster. Sir Lindsay has also backed general issues affecting Gibraltar, for example the future of the Girl Guide movement.

1300 Gibraltar continues to be represented at the State Opening of Parliament and many other events, to which Commonwealth High Commissioners are also invited. Gibraltar House in London has maintained direct contact with Commonwealth institutions as well as High Commissions, many of which take a close interest in our affairs. Over the years, for example, the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and India have all visited Gibraltar. The High Commissioner of Malta was here last week. I had the opportunity to meet again with 1305 Baroness Scotland, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. Gibraltar was represented at all key Royal Household events, including the Commonwealth Day Mass.

In November, I attended a meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council between the UK and Overseas Territories Governments. A joint declaration was negotiated at this meeting in London. That document affirms the principle of equal rights and self-determination of the British Overseas Territories as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. It also sets out UK support for requests for removal, of those Territories who wish it, from the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories, and it restates the enduring commitment to counter hostile sovereignty claims. This turned out to be a very productive meeting, and in many respects this was a landmark document. That meeting included a visit by delegates to Buckingham Palace to meet His Majesty the King. It is no secret that King Charles takes a very close interest in the Overseas Territories, including 1315 Gibraltar. He was very well informed about current issues which affect us.

Work with the other Overseas Territories is an important part, too, of the role undertaken by Gibraltar House in London. Meetings of UKOTA representatives take place at least twice a month. UKOTA is the umbrella organisation for the UK Overseas Territories. It provides a forum for 1320 interaction between us. It also provides the opportunity to raise issues with the FCDO officials

tasked with matters which impact upon the Overseas Territories generally. On our last National Day, we had the pleasure of the company, in Gibraltar, of Overseas Territory leaders and representatives, who continue to work together to shape the British government's strategy towards its Territories and to protect and further our interests.

1325 Madam Speaker, last year, young people from Gibraltar took part in the UK Youth Parliament and the Yokota Youth Summit. They were supported by my office and by Gibraltar House in London. This year, there are plans to send young delegates to the Commonwealth Youth Parliament in New Zealand. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and associated events will take place in October, in Samoa. That will include the Youth Forum, Business
1330 Forum, People's Forum and Women's Forum. The London office also provided support for Gibraltar's participation in COP28.

Gibraltar House also keeps in regular contact with our former Governors. They are always ready to support Gibraltar and its people in any way they can. Last year, our UK representative, Dominique Searle, sadly attended funeral services for Sir John Chapple and Lady Luce, both of
1335 whom were fondly remembered here.

I want to thank Dominique Searle and the team at Gibraltar House for their hard work over the last financial year.

Madam Speaker, I will now cover the Government's wider international lobbying activities. The focus of the Government over the financial year has been London, Madrid, Brussels, Washington
1340 and New York. That is a matter of public record. I have worked on these different strands together with my friend and colleague the Chief Minister. It is true to say that the bulk of the time has been occupied by the considerable effort to conclude a treaty on the future relationship of Gibraltar with the European Union, but the intensity of that work has impacted on what we could do in other areas. All those workstreams have, as a central objective, the promotion and protection of
1345 Gibraltar and its people, and it is obvious that some of those efforts are more sensitive than others.

The Government has continued to deliver the Gibraltar message to decision-makers in the United States of America. Much of this has been about putting Gibraltar on the map. The strategic value of our location at the western end of the Mediterranean Sea has shot up considerably with
1350 the growth of instability and conflict at its eastern end. The attacks on shipping in the Red Sea have been primarily responsible for this situation. In a foreign affairs congressional meeting room a few weeks ago, I was pleased to dwell on some of these issues when briefing interested parties, together with the Deputy Ambassador of the United Kingdom to the United States of America. It is not well known that the first ever action of the US Navy in 1801 was from a base here in Gibraltar
1355 against Barbary pirates from North Africa. We were able to engage with 18 Republican and Democratic congressional officers in one and a half days in Washington. The Government is delighted to have been able to work hand in hand together with the United Kingdom on such matters. The opportunity was taken, too, to meet with other decision-makers in the US Capitol.

Last August, we welcomed to Gibraltar a delegation from the powerful Defense Appropriations
1360 Committee of the US Congress. The group of seven congressmen included the chairman and nine staffers, and they flew here directly from Andrews Air Force Base. They stayed overnight and left for Germany the next day. Hon. Members will know that this is not the first congressional delegation to visit Gibraltar. The Government will continue to work on such visits in the future.

This House will know that a resolution on Gibraltar has been formally dropped annually in the
1365 US Congress for a number of years now. That sets out the historic relationship between Gibraltar and the United States of America. It touches upon our role in two world wars and it highlights that Operation Torch, spearheaded by US Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, was planned from tunnels inside the Rock itself. The General later became the 34th President of the United States. The resolution supports the right of the people of Gibraltar to choose their own future.

1370 The Government welcomed, too, the ongoing work by the Gibraltar branch of AMCHAM, the American Chamber of Commerce. This trade aspect is an important part of the developing relationship. In this context, I wish to thank David Liston, the Government's representative in the

United States, for his continued assistance and invaluable support. The Government intends to continue with this multifaceted effort in Washington over the financial year ahead.

1375 In the same way, we will persist with our work at the United Nations in New York. This process is slow and will take time. Nonetheless, it is important. So it was a privilege to represent the Government and the Chief Minister at the last session of the Fourth Committee in October. This came only a few days after the General Election. My colleague the Minister for Health and Care delivered the Government's address to the Committee of 24 last month. In the coming financial
1380 year, we will, as usual, argue a case both before the Committee of 24 and before the Fourth Committee, and we will continue to promote and defend our right to self-determination. There is no other way to secure the removal of a country from the UN List of Non-Self-Governing Territories. This very public workstream will also run in parallel with more discreet meetings and contacts behind the scenes as we seek to take this matter forward.

1385 Moving on from lobbying, the Office of the Deputy Chief Minister also oversees the Gibraltar National Archives. I am pleased to report to the House that there is now a new Archivist in post, Mr Gerard Wood. The Archives continue to receive enquiries for historical research and requests for information from all over the world. Indeed, some two-thirds of overall enquiries over the last financial year were not generated locally. Enquiries by email have doubled from what they were
1390 during the previous 12 months. A wealth of historical content continues to be digitised and made available online. This enhanced digital repository now holds an extensive collection of documents, images, cartography, video and oral audio histories. The Archives are confident that as those digital holdings expand, there will be further engagement with scholars and researchers worldwide.

1395 As custodians of our collective past, the National Archives play a crucial role in preserving and disseminating the knowledge that they hold. A presentation was delivered to St Joseph's Upper Primary School about the wartime evacuation of Gibraltarians. This was followed by another one on Gibraltar during the outbreak of World War II. The GNA are clear that this interaction with students will equip them with enhanced research skills that extend beyond history. Such skills can
1400 be used in other walks of life as well. The highlight of this public outreach last year was an exhibition to mark the 60th anniversary of Gibraltar at the United Nations. This was held at the John Mackintosh Hall. It recalled the different appearances of the elected representatives of Gibraltar before the Committee of 24 and the Fourth Committee from 1963 until 2023. All this work will serve to bridge the gap between past and present, ensuring that our heritage remains
1405 alive for generations to come.

Moving on now to civil aviation, the Director of Civil Aviation (DCA) has continued to actively encourage and promote flight safety and security in all civil aviation activities in Gibraltar. The International Civil Aviation Organisation audited the UK Aviation Safety Oversight System in November 2022. None of the Crown Dependencies or Overseas Territories were audited as part
1410 of that process. The ICAO has stated that it intends to audit one of the Crown Dependencies or Gibraltar before the end of 2025. The Director currently maintains a compliance checklist and protocol question responses for all 19 of the annexes to the Chicago Convention against current regulations, in readiness for a possible audit. The continued update of the compliance checklist and protocol questions will remain a high priority moving forward.

1415 The Director of Civil Aviation has continued to liaise directly with the UK DfT through the UK State Safety Board, on which Gibraltar is fully represented. There is also engagement with the State Safety Board Working Group. A key component of this work is to update the Gibraltar State Safety Programme and develop the Gibraltar National Aviation Safety Plan. These documents combine to provide an overview on how aviation safety is managed within Gibraltar. They also
1420 serve to drive improvement in this area. This is in line with both UK and global objectives. Aviation is an extremely safe form of transport. It is precisely due to initiatives like these that existing high standards constantly improve.

The Director continues with an ongoing audit programme of activities at the Airport, too. This is part of the safety and security oversight responsibilities of the office. It is necessary to

1425 demonstrate continued compliance with stringent international civil aviation requirements. In the
past year, audits of the following areas have taken place: air traffic control services, airfield fire
and rescue services, aviation security in the Air Terminal on three occasions, safety of foreign
1430 aircraft audits at the Airport, search and rescue capability. These audits, which were undertaken
by the UK CAA inspectors, have provided the Director with the confidence that international
standards are being met and that action plans are put in place. All organisations involved should
be thanked for their open approach to such audits and for the responsiveness in taking matters
forward.

Drone activity has reduced slightly in the last year. However, there remain a significant number
of local, commercial and recreational operators registered with the Director of Civil Aviation. In
1435 addition, there is a steady stream of film companies coming to Gibraltar wishing to incorporate
drones into their filming activity. The support of stakeholders such as the Department of the
Environment, the Ministry of Defence and the Port in helping to make those flights possible is
greatly appreciated. Last year, there was also a significant increase in the number of Spanish drone
operators liaising with the DCA and air traffic control. The reason for this is to ensure that their
1440 flights, which take place outside Gibraltar airspace but inside the bay, are properly co-ordinated
with flights to and from the Airport.

The Director and the airport authorities are consultees to the Development and Planning
Commission and advise on the impact of new construction on aircraft operations. Developers are
now much more keenly aware of the limitations imposed when constructing developments close
1445 to the runway. Indeed, it is welcome that the designs which are being put forward tend to be more
compliant. Moreover, the inclusion of wind and aeronautical studies to prove the compliance of
their proposed developments has now become the accepted norm. This provides reassurance to
the Director and to the airport authorities. The DCA therefore works closely with the Town
Planning Department. This co-operation has ensured that aviation safety advice is always taken
1450 on board and heeded at meetings of the DPC.

The Director of Civil Aviation has quarterly meetings with the United Kingdom Department for
Transport to discuss regulatory issues which relate to safety and security. In addition to this, the
Director meets on a six-monthly basis with his counterparts from the Crown Dependencies,
together with the Department for Transport. This provides a framework for the discussion of areas
1455 of regulatory concern and for the discussion of emerging new technologies. I want to take this
opportunity to thank Chris Purkiss, the Director of Civil Aviation, for his assistance and support
over the year.

Madam Speaker, I will now move on to update the House on a number of government projects.
The first are the works at the Northern Defences. This area has become an increasingly popular
1460 spot for families, visitors, charities, schools and other organisations. The House will recall that it
lay neglected and abandoned for decades. Sections of this historic network of fortifications have
now been exposed, repaired and improved. In September, AquaGib will start to lay new water
mains. The provision of utilities to this part of Gibraltar has always been a challenge. Investigations
and survey works continue. This will help to identify the most efficient and sensitive routes
1465 through which to provide such services. This year we will also see the laying of electrical
infrastructure to provide up-lighting of the northern walls of our castle keep. Castle
Communication, a tunnel which connects Moorish Castle Estate to the Prince's Lines, will be
illuminated also. While the removal of vegetation along walls and fortifications will continue after
the nesting season, two breaks in vegetation will be introduced this year. These breaks will serve
1470 a dual purpose. The first is precisely to reduce the risk of fire. The second, by locating them
strategically, will see two key historic defensive structures exposed. These structures are the
retrenchment wall and the castle batteries.

The Northern Defences is expected to become a catalyst for improvements in nearby areas. It
should allow for the co-ordinated use of several other associated historic sites, like the Grand
Battery. The Government has recently unblocked several embrasures there, which have been
1475 prepared to receive the display of a number of historic guns. This, too, will generate further

1480 interest in our military past. My friend and colleague the Minister for Heritage is leading on that initiative. However, as mentioned last year, a key achievement has been the completion of the mains water supply project. This was finished by a series of steps which have cleverly disguised metres of buried pipework. It has also allowed for a new tourist product. That product is a military trail which connects the Tower of Homage to Grand Casement Square and the Town area through the Northern Defences.

1485 The Government is now in discussion with a preferred bidder following an expression of interest process for the future management of the site. This will complete the journey to convert the work there into a reality. The policy of the Government remains to expose over 1,000 years of Gibraltar's military history as a visitor descends through the fortifications down those historic steps and ramps. The site will showcase our Islamic, Spanish and British history. The experience will add considerable tourism value to what Gibraltar already has to offer, and at the same time it will also provide a home to family-friendly and educational activities.

1490 Our commitment to heritage is also evident in the restoration of other key monuments and buildings, such as the one where we currently sit. The renovation of Parliament House, as hon. Members know, has already commenced. This will include repairs to its historic fabric, the installation of a new lift, the introduction of modern technology, the replacement of outdated infrastructure and the restoration of the building's features.

1495 The current ongoing works focus on two main elements, the first related to the external fabric. In that area, investigations have been completed on the condition of the roof, walls and columns. Rendering and repairs have also commenced. Some aspects, such as the random rubble walls which you see today, will be exposed in the lobby. This feature deserves to be on public display, as it will serve as a reminder of a form of construction which is no longer in use.

1500 Internal stripping-out works and demolitions have been completed over the last year. This has allowed for a full survey on the internal condition of the actual building. Works to the interior will consist of providing new offices, meeting rooms, storage areas, accessible toilet facilities and a lift. This is a master plan which was approved by the Development and Planning Commission and upon which hon. Members opposite were consulted beforehand.

1505 Another site with huge potential is the Mount. This location was home to Gibraltar's foremost Royal Engineer and several admirals and flag officers. The Government will continue to invest in this project during this financial year. The approach adopted here is similar to that successfully applied at the Northern Defences, given its heritage value, size and diverse ecosystem. This gradual, phased approach has meant that we embarked on several more manageable projects within a huge master plan. The first is a path to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve. Most of the historical paths within the grounds have now been cleared. Many had been hidden from view, buried under rubble, bushes and weeds. This has allowed us to better evaluate the full extent of the works to be executed. A route from the Porter's Lodge, located at the northern entrance to the site, all the way to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, is currently being cleared. This will allow future visitors to explore the garden and subsequently connect to the existing Upper Rock Nature Reserve trails, which have been successfully restored as well.

1515 The refurbishment of the Porter's Lodge itself is almost complete. This extensive refurbishment will allow for the building to become part of the facilities at the Mount. It can operate as a management office or a registry office. This will be the first step towards creating the necessary amenities to manage events at this location. The events hall, a separate building in the centre of the site, has also been surveyed. Designs have been produced and the Government has recently gone out to tender for its refurbishment. The intention is for this charming building, together with the Porter's Lodge and outside space, to be used once again to host functions and ceremonies within a green, historic setting in Gibraltar itself. A key to achieving a suitable atmosphere for ceremonies and events is the proper creation and maintenance of the gardens and outdoor spaces. The Government has already commenced the repairs of the terraced gardens with the use of gabions, which will reinforce collapsed retaining walls. This is the same method recently used at the Northern Defences as well. Those terraces will extend to the Porter's Lodge. The area will

1530 allow for orchards, water features and children's activities. The existing tennis court has been largely refurbished and a new padel court will be introduced.

Central to the whole project is the main residence at the Mount. This beautiful Georgian building is in need of significant investment. It is currently being surveyed. These investigations will allow us to better appreciate its condition, as well as the associated cost of its restoration. I want to thank the project director at the Mount, the Northern Defences and Parliament, Mr Carl Viagas, whose expertise in such restorations is well known to all here.

1535 Madam Speaker, I want to update the House on other developments. The House knows that the Government continues in discussions with their preferred bidder in respect of the redevelopment of the old Air Terminal site. A treaty or no treaty outcome will colour the way forward given the critical location of the plot of land in question.

1540 On another matter, the project to redevelop the Rooke site now has outlying planning permission. The developers have agreed to open up the No. 4 dock, as requested, and have redesigned it to create a significant public space right in the centre of town. A further cash premium of £10 million is due on full planning consent.

1545 Meanwhile, the Government continues in negotiations with a preferred bidder in respect of the old GBC site at South Barrack Road. This, too, followed a public expression of interest process. More details will be made available in the event that the negotiations move to the MoU stage. I take the opportunity to thank the management and staff of Land Property Services Ltd for their professional advice and the staff of the Lands Office in Convent Place.

1550 In conclusion, Madam Speaker, there are not many places on the planet at the moment which can estimate a budgetary surplus. This is, therefore, a better position to be in, a step forward. Public finances and economies all over the world have taken a battering over the last few years, and Gibraltar has been no exception. The pandemic cost us hundreds of millions of pounds. That same cost has saddled governments everywhere with higher levels of debt. The war in Ukraine has fuelled a cost-of-living crisis, and the negative impact of Brexit in the United Kingdom continues to be felt.

1555 It is no secret that the consequences of our own departure from the European Union have been an all-consuming process for the Government. We have, since 2016, as I said, sensibly dealt with that in phases, one step at a time. The first cemented our links with the United Kingdom. The second established the framework for Gibraltar's orderly withdrawal. The third led to the political agreement for a treaty together with the United Kingdom and Spain. The fourth and final phase is the actual conclusion of a treaty with the European Union. This intensive process has taken its toll on an administration as small as our own. The effects have been cross-cutting between Departments and Ministries, and it has gone hand in hand with a workstream designed to mitigate some of the consequences of no treaty at all. In those circumstances, it is not unexpected that we have been unable to devote as much attention as we would have liked to other areas. This disappointed many people. We get that. All governments make mistakes and we have never claimed to be infallible. There is always room for improvement, there is always more that could be done, but the fact that we were re-elected for a fourth term consecutively, in spite of what was thrown at us, is a sign that many people got this too.

1570 Madam Speaker, it remains for me to thank the public for their renewed trust. I am grateful to my Ministry staff, Ernest Francis, Stephen Britto and Coral Schembri. I want to thank you, too, the Clerk and the staff of the Parliament.

Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

Adjournment

1575 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now recess to tomorrow at 11 o'clock in the morning, when we will hear from the Minister for the

Environment, although I will ask the House to excuse me, as I may not be able to be here during the course of that speech in particular.

Madam Speaker: We will recess until tomorrow at 11 a.m.

The House adjourned at 6.30 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11 a.m. – 12.36 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 2nd July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Tuesday, 2nd July 2024. Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024 continued.

5 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Prof. Cortes.

Minister for the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Good morning, Madam Speaker. I was so pleased that the Deputy Chief Minister yesterday reset the tone after the rather vitriolic contribution from the Leader of the Opposition. For my part, to quote the Hon. Mr Azopardi, I intend to provide some glorious positivity – responsible, but glorious nevertheless, because there are lots of things happening out there, good things, and people need to know.

10 This is my 13th Budget, which is not bad going for somebody who intended to be in this House for just four years. Billy Connolly once said, ‘The desire to be a politician should bar you for life from ever becoming one.’ I never desired it, so I guess that is why I am still here and why, I guess, I am here for life.

15 There have been many changes since my last Budget speech, approximately 12 months ago. We have seen the departure of a Governor, Sir David Steel – who was so close to the community and whom I, personally, will greatly miss – while we have welcomed the new Governor, Sir Ben Bathurst, with whom I have already had positive engagement. We have seen the departure of five Ministers, my friends Steven Linares, Samantha Sacramento, Paul Balban, Albert Isola and Vijay Daryanani, as well as some long-serving Members of the Opposition. We have welcomed four new Ministers who bring their own excellent skills and experience to the team, and new Members of the Opposition. To the new Members, I offer the support my experience in this House brings, an experience that I never thought I would gather but the years have passed fast. Looking across at the Opposition benches, I see that, perhaps surprisingly, the new Members make a lot more sense and look and sound a lot more genuine than some of the old. Sometimes, I think that one or two of them are actually sitting on the wrong side and have values and ideas much more akin to ours than to the politics of some of their colleagues. Whether or not this is the case, I urge all to be true to their principles and beliefs, to be professional and respectful and to learn from those who are, and not from those who repeatedly and rather unashamedly cross unacceptable boundaries of fairness and justice.

25 This year’s Budget must reflect current circumstances, very different to those that reigned prior to Brexit and the pandemic – the rise in the cost of living, the need to continue our post-COVID economic recovery and the overshadowing uncertainty of ‘the deal’ – so, my speech will largely refer to what will be advanced at less financial cost by way of changes in policies and

processes to improve delivery and services, imaginatively attracting alternative sources of funding or generating income: sustainable savings, to coin a phrase.

40 Most of us in this House have political aspirations and we all want to deliver on our manifesto commitments. Doing this without due consideration to reality would be irresponsible, and I, for one, am very alive to my obligations to the community not just today but tomorrow, next year and in 10 years' time when, together with the Father of the House, I may well still be here. As responsible custodians of the public purse we must accept that at this moment in time we need to spend only in the most responsible way.

45 Madam Speaker, the recent General Election was very close; closer, I believe, than it should have been given our record of delivering for the community and the legacy that we have created. Let us, just for one moment, travel back in time to 2011, but first let us examine an important concept in ecology: that of reverse shifting baseline syndrome. Shifting baseline syndrome occurs when conditions of the natural environment gradually change over time yet people falsely
50 perceive less change because they do not know, or fail to recall accurately, how the natural environment looked in the past. C S Lewis captured the same concept when he wrote: 'It is funny how day by day nothing changes, but when you look back everything is different.'

Let me just list a few examples to take us back to the baseline of 2011: the KGV psychiatric unit; no dementia daycare centre; a dilapidated PCC; no university; no city centre parks; grimy,
55 slimy diesel power generation; no new schools. I could go on: no equality in marriage, no progress on women's reproductive rights, etc. Anyone who fails to recognise the achievement of this Government, as I suspect the Opposition will do during this session, is clearly plagued with the most severe case of this deadly syndrome, but we will keep on reminding them of where we were just over a decade ago, because the Government that I have been proud to be part of for close on
60 13 years has vision. The party opposite has none, and to paraphrase the Book of Proverbs, without a vision the parties perish. They have no vision, which is why some of their most senior Members choose to rant in fake anger. As the late Desmond Tutu once said, 'Don't raise your voice, improve your argument.' Indeed, often when I listen to some of the Opposition I am reminded of the words of the 19th-century American politician Davis F Houston, who said, 'One could drive a prairie
65 schooner through any part of the arguments and never scrape against the facts.' I am hopeful that the new Opposition Members will raise the standards of behaviour and of sound and fair argument on that side of the House.

I can boast, under my ministerial portfolios alone, over the past three terms, eight new schools, two parks, new tourist sites, field centres, a dementia day centre, a mental health facility, a day
70 surgery, chemotherapy and more. My political ideology is socialist and clearly centred on fairness, equality, the embracing of diversity, legacy, innovation and sustainability.

We will lead within the public sector and assist the private sector in reducing material costs and improving processes, thereby increasing revenue while improving the environment. We will strive to come up with new and imaginative ways of creating revenue, of building new pillars for
75 our economy and attracting inward investment, not only to allow us to continue investing in our children and their future, but to ensure Gibraltar continues to thrive in the face of whatever adversity may await. I will pour every ounce of energy into helping keep Gibraltar running safe today, tomorrow and always. There is more to El Jardinero than some may realise, and thanks to the Chief Minister, everybody knows that El Jardinero's email is john.cortes@gibraltar.gov.gi.

80 If I may now delve into my departmental responsibilities, I will commence by making very brief reference to two portfolios that I proudly held for seven months of the financial year under review: Public Health and Culture. I want to thank the Director of Public Health, Dr Helen Carter, and her team for their work during that time. We covered important ground, not just through COVID but subsequently, too, with much work on public awareness and a great deal of advice provided to
85 both medical and environmental professionals. I greatly enjoyed my 12 years as Public Health Minister.

During my last seven months in Culture, we continued the work to promote Gibraltarian culture at home and abroad after having ensured it flourished during the years of COVID, when

some questioned its relevance. Indeed, we saw a cultural renaissance then that continues still. Initiatives such as Rock Retreat residencies, cultural exchanges in the UK, Morocco and in Gibraltar flourished. Notably, I was proud to attend two drama festivals in the United Kingdom, including the National Drama Festival in Coventry, where Gibraltar plays won awards, one of them going to my friend and successor Christian Santos and his extraordinary original play *Signed, Me*.

Two of what I think are the most significant achievements were consolidated last year. The first is the recognition of growing Gibraltarian literature: the creation of the Book Council. *El otro*, relevant across Culture, Education and Heritage, is what we have done to save Llanito for the recognition of our multiple languages in our community, but more about this later. I give my sincere thanks here to my former team at the Ministry of Culture and to Seamus Byrne and all at Cultural Services, as well as to the vast cultural community that enriches our land. I must say that my granddaughter, Lea, keeps me well up to date with the performing arts, and I have been on the dramatic stage a couple of times in the past year, too.

I move on to my current responsibilities, and I will start with Environment. There is one thing that we can be proud of across this House, and on which there is unanimity. That is climate change. It is of great significance and shows the maturity of our community that in this House we do not have representatives who deny the reality and dangers of climate change, nor indeed who expound the ultra-right-wing denial postures that plague politics and parliaments elsewhere. Indeed, as we have seen in the recently activated Select Committee on the Environment, we are as one in seeking to improve our environmental performance.

Work on mitigating our effect on the climate, as well as adapting to the impacts that are now inevitable, continues. While our efforts in Gibraltar will not halt the climate crisis, *como decía mi madre, un grano no hace un granero, pero ayuda a su compañero*. Moreover, climate action has other, more immediate benefits, such as cost savings and improved air quality.

The Near Zero Energy Building legislation that came into force in 2021 is now starting to have an effect, as major developments are being reviewed and refined to ensure that they deliver the most efficient and sustainable designs possible. It is generally accepted that the operating phase of a building can account for up to 80% of its lifetime costs. Building owners and facility managers are looking for ways to reduce operating costs without compromising performance. Building green offers a sustainable, cost-effective solution to reducing energy, water consumption and maintenance costs. We are currently working with industry to ensure that the tools that are available to them for the assessment of a building's energy performance are able to accurately model these passive elements. A number of events related to sustainability in building and planning will be taking place over the next year and we hope to build up to a second Sustainability Conference in 2025.

The independent Climate Change Committee continues to provide advice and support to Government in respect of its progress towards net zero. The Committee recently had the chance to present to the Select Committee and will continue to liaise with the Net Zero Delivery Body as well as the Select Committee, and I will shortly be laying their first report on the table in this House.

The 2021 emissions inventory showed that emissions had increased by 11% from 2020, the expected bounce-back after COVID. Nevertheless, emissions overall have decreased by 10% since 2015. Having removed the biggest problem of the past – the diesel generators – transport remains the biggest challenge to our carbon agenda and to air quality, but we are tackling the issue in various ways and we will be seeing improvements as we progress with electric vehicle charging and alternative fuels, all of which are being actively discussed with stakeholders.

The Net Zero Delivery Body, with the Deputy Chief Minister as chair, has met three times since the end of the last financial year. Its aim is to accelerate climate action across the public sector and facilitate collaboration and information sharing. This approach has already delivered the EV Charging Infrastructure Strategy as well as the Renewable Energy Strategy. One of the areas in which work has accelerated over the last few years is the delivery of environmental education. Members of the body were able to visit schools during World Environment Day to get a flavour of

what goes on there in creating understanding and preparing our young people to be active environmental citizens. This work has been further complemented by the rollout of carbon literacy training to teachers and support staff across the schools. Carbon literacy is an understanding of the carbon costs and impacts of everyday activities and, critically, the ability and motivation to reduce emissions on an individual, community and organisational basis.

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On renewables, efforts to increase the percentage of energy produced from renewable sources continue as new solar projects such as Engineer Lane Car Park, Mid-Harbours and St Joseph's School have come online in the last year. My colleague the Minister for Utilities will provide more information on renewable energy in her speech. Solar remains the most realistic option in Gibraltar. New sites for installations have been identified and the call to industry to arrive at a list of approved suppliers will issue shortly. Separately, the Department is considering the possibility of wind power in limited sites where there will not be a negative environmental impact.

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The rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure is a crucial step toward promoting sustainable transportation and reducing greenhouse emissions. EV points are now installed at sites across Gibraltar and more are in process. We will be seeing significant progress here as the Ministry is working with GEA to install more charging stations. By encouraging the adoption of electric vehicles, we aim to reduce air pollution and direct dependence on fossil fuels.

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Everyone agrees that we need better air quality in order for us and, in particular, our children and the elderly, to breathe. Poor air quality has been proven to cause long-term health effects, including death. Having cleaned up power generation, we all know that the challenge to tackle air quality in our streets is to reduce emissions from vehicles, and so we are encouraging electrification, alternative and public transport, and will first tackle the heaviest polluters, such as the older heavy goods vehicles. In view of this and its now clear wider social implications, the measure announced yesterday by the Chief Minister, conceived in absolute good faith, will not – I repeat, will not – be implemented. The measure is not coming back. We will find different ways of tackling air quality, pulling together as a community and not letting the real benefits to health be clouded or overshadowed by measures that will prejudice our citizens, especially the less well-off. No way, Madam Speaker.

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The change is here. Hybrid vehicles proved, by far, to be the most popular cars registered last year. There were 29 diesel, 19 electric, 100 petrol and 421 hybrid vehicles registered. That is 74% that were hybrid. Adding electric cars, it becomes over 77%. That is tremendous progress, which also means considerably less air pollution in our streets already. We are currently assessing the Government's own fleet, to determine reduction and electrification wherever possible. I have met with the fuel suppliers and we are working very well together with the aim to provide both charging points and introduce less-polluting fuel alternatives. We have a challenge ahead in achieving electrification and I am certain that we will succeed.

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The 25-year Environment Plan is being published as a consultation document on the government website this month. This live document has been drafted by the Department's committed and forward-thinking technical officers and will serve to further cement the fundamental pillars of environmental protection, green governance and sustainable living into our community, and further establishes the green Gibraltar concept that has been central to government thinking, especially since our 2019 manifesto.

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The team at the Department's Field Centre at Tovey Cottage, composed of Nature Reserve officials, wildlife wardens, expert bird of prey handlers and volunteers, continues to provide an amazing opportunity for outdoor learning. Twelve schools have visited this year, amounting to over 600 children. The team continues to spearhead wildlife restoration programmes from its unique setting in the Upper Rock. This year they continued to breed Barbary partridges for release and are presently also focusing their efforts on little owls and the majestic Bonelli's eagle, which will hopefully grace our skies again in the not-too-distant future.

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In December of last year I was honoured to attend the COP28 conference in Dubai as part of the UK delegation, together with representatives of other Overseas Territories. The Gibraltar team attended a number of important sessions, meetings and briefings and signed up to the Waste to

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195 Zero initiative on the decarbonisation of waste. I was humbled but proud to be selected for a special event as one of 50 so-called global environment leaders. Our lobbying during the event and now post-COP is focused on trying to overcome the challenges we face as small territories in accessing climate finance and ensuring greater engagement with the UK negotiating team ahead of the next COP.

200 Despite ongoing delays in the administration of some trans-frontier shipment licences as a result of Brexit, the export of municipal waste and recycling has continued, but changes in EU legislation and the possibility of an NNO mean that we must develop how we manage and reduce our waste. A call for expressions of interest to provide a waste management facility with the option of full self-sufficiency and resilience will be published this week. This will be designed to ensure maximum separation of recyclates and will also have to provide a waste treatment option to increase our resilience in this area. Organic waste will soon have to be collected separately from
205 other municipal waste, as is occurring throughout Europe, and we will see the rollout of additional brown bins for this. The biggest difficulty at the moment is dealing with construction rubble as administrative problems with exportation remain unresolved. However, the situation is under control as the Coaling Island reclamation site has capacity for the near future. New legislation to regulate recycling has also now been enacted, which will hopefully result in an increase in our
210 overall recycling levels. The Department is supporting the eco park with its appeal, through which they are collecting clothing, houseware, linen and toys and exporting to Senegal, where it is distributed to those in extreme poverty.

In relation to cleansing, extra services have been rolled out by way of cleaning of internal communal areas and *el turno* has now been applied to 10 more residential areas. Some of the
215 many initiatives include extra power hosing and rotor washing of public areas, including housing estates, through the summer months, and the new purpose-built refuse cubicle in Governor's Parade, one of several measures to help reduce the impact of refuse on Main Street.

A new dog park was opened in October at the end of Eastern Beach Road, bringing much joy to our four-legged friends and their owners.

220 Our litter wardens continue in their determination to keep Gibraltar clean, and two wardens regularly patrol our streets and review camera footage. Since 1st January 2024, they have issued 52 fines totalling £18,250.

The Environmental Agency continues to advise me in their various areas of expertise. The Agency responded to 1,908 complaints in 2023 and 528 this year so far. They operate an after-
225 hours service, which saw their officers and the pest control team engage in 225 calls out in 2023 and, at the time of writing, 99 so far this year. Most complaints received by the Agency are regarding nuisances, food safety, pests and housing conditions. They served 47 abatement notices in 2023; thus far, 4 this year. Some of these cases have led to court summonses leading to successful prosecutions with fines totalling £10,060 last year and £15,760 so far this year.

230 The most recent fully ratified year of data from the Gibraltar Air Quality Monitoring Network for 2023 shows continued compliance with the current limit values, something that was simply unachievable before 2012. There has been significant long-term improvement in key pollutants nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter, and the trend continues. This was one of our biggest challenges on coming into government, and we have achieved what seemed impossible. We will
235 continue to focus on understanding and reducing emissions from traffic and shipping, to further improve our performance.

With continuous improvements, Gibraltar's network now reports measurements for PM10 and PM2.5, the particulates, at both Rosia Road and Bleak House, which represents an increase in PM
240 monitoring, so we have more than ever before. Over the last few years, the fixed network has been supplemented with other monitoring installations in potential hotspots, and we now have five operational air quality mesh pods in addition. The Witham's air monitoring station served this purpose once power generating operations in the South District ceased, and has now been relocated to Devil's Tower Road, where it began recording data in 2023.

245 The Agency continues to work closely with the Department of the Environment and the Office of Civil Contingency on issues such as contingency planning on food imports and exports in the event of NNO.

250 The Agency, together with the Department's Environmental Protection Research Unit, has been increasing efforts to tackle dog fouling and targeting dog owners who do not have their dogs licensed or registered. In 2023, they collected 171 DNA samples with 13 fixed penalty notices issued, and so far this year 106 samples with 12 notices issued. In 2023, 64 registration patrols were carried out – that is more than one a week – which resulted in 32 notices being issued for no registration or licence, and so far this year checks on dogs have resulted in eight such FPNs. These patrols give the officers the opportunity to catch owners who are not complying and oblige them to regularise their position, thus ensuring that their DNA profile is registered and improving the effectiveness of DNA sample. On occasion, the Agency has to issue summonses to the Magistrates' Court for non-payment of an FPN, and so far this has resulted in £1,700 in fines this year.

260 The Agency is the competent authority for the Control of Major Accident Hazard (COMAH), and recently hosted two Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspectors from the UK to carry out an electrical control and cyber-security inspection as part of the inspection regime of the LNG plant. In November 2023, the Agency, in conjunction with the Office of Civil Contingencies and with the HSE, held a second LNG live exercise with all emergency responders and stakeholders taking part.

265 They continue to monitor the quality of our bathing waters, where standards have been consistent since improving markedly after 2011. Five of our bathing waters continue to be classed as 'excellent', with Western Beach maintaining the 'good' classification.

270 Madam Speaker, my Ministry continues to work closely with the Office of Civil Contingencies, the MoD and other key partners in the emergency preparedness, resilience and response of a radiation emergency involving nuclear-powered warships. As the Minister responsible for the Radiation Regulations 2004, I chair the Radiation Response Committee as well as the Strategic Co-ordination Group during the MoD's Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator's live exercise, which aims to demonstrate the MoD Operators Emergency Plan and the Gibraltar Radiation Emergency Response Plan for dealing with an off-site emergency. Exercise Rocky Pigeon, as it is called, the triennial exercise, was last conducted in late 2022, and the regulators confirmed Gibraltar's robust emergency arrangements and very effective response overall. Work now continues for the next test live exercise, which is scheduled to take place next year.

275 Going, now, to our beaches, winter and spring storms once again caused damage around the Rock's coastline, but our beaches were ready for the summer thanks to the great effort of the Department of Environment, Technical Services and contractors. There are still some issues with accumulation of *Rugulopteryx*, the invasive Japanese seaweed being washed ashore at Western Beach, from where hundreds of tonnes of seaweed have been removed. This is a problem that is being experienced around the whole region, with the species now having been detected in Italian waters and so continuing its spread across the Mediterranean.

285 A comprehensive refurbishment programme was carried out at Little Bay. The concrete tables have been replaced with eight new ones, making 90 in total, and the entire seating area along all the different tiers of the Lido Beach has also been refurbished. Camp Bay Keys Promenade pier, which had been undermined by wave action and storm damage, has been restored by Technical Services, with a new rock revetment constructed around it. New marine-grade stainless steel stairs have been placed, providing access to the sea, and the main Camp Bay pier has been totally resurfaced. At Catalan Bay the wooden walkway giving access from the car park to the beach and the village has seen a complete overhaul. At Sandy Bay, the railings along the stairs leading down to the beach from the road at the northern end of the beach have been replaced. Further details of the preparatory work at our beaches will be included in the published version of this speech, which will be issued by the Press Office.

295 Improvements to the lifeguard service have been noticeable, thanks to an increased and rigorous training programme and improved supervision. The comprehensive year-round training

programme now starts in September, immediately after the closure of the official bathing season, so as to encourage and prepare potential candidates better.

Improvements at the North Front Cemetery continue. Last year saw some critical infrastructure improvements, including the refurbishment of the public toilets. The digitisation of records, including vaults and graves, is one area on which my team, together with Digital Services, is currently working. Beautifying the North Front Cemetery is also on the agenda. This year will see the commencement of beautification works on the forecourt and there are planned changes to the management of green spaces within the cemetery, including the planting of more trees and hedges to help ensure that this sacred place maintains its air of serenity. Improvements to our other cemeteries are also on the cards with improved support and maintenance to both Witham's and Trafalgar.

Commonwealth and Champion Parks remain a delight. As always, talking about green areas, I remain committed to planting trees and creating more green open spaces for the public. This is surprisingly difficult given the location of underground services in many areas where we would like to plant trees. Despite this, there were 204 trees planted in 2023, and we will soon see new greenery popping up in the most unexpected of places. Green initiatives incentivising tree planting and the greening of urban areas are being reviewed and proposed. These help filter air pollutants, absorb carbon dioxide and provide natural shade and respite. We all know the benefits to physical and mental health and how urban biodiversity improves by providing food and habitat for pollinators. We are working together with a revitalised Gibraltar Horticultural Society and other NGOs on these projects.

The removal of invasive plant species to provide habitat for native plants will continue. Rewilded areas, such as at Nun's Well, are proving the success of returning sites to nature. My friend and fellow botanist Lesley Linares of GOHNS Botanical Section tells me that the site, formerly waste ground used by lorries, now holds over 50 species of plants, many of them rare.

The work that we do in protecting urban wildlife has not gone unnoticed. UK environmental campaigner Hannah Bourne-Taylor has used Gibraltar as an example of how protection can work and go hand in hand with construction. Gibraltar's decades-old policy of providing nest sites for swifts, which dates from the time of the first GSLP Government, has ensured a healthy population of both of our urban swift species despite extensive refurbishment and construction. Hannah's efforts to introduce similar policies in England, where the swift is threatened with extinction, have so far failed, and I have been working with her, and will continue to work with her, in explaining the success of our world-leading policy to UK Ministers.

The Botanic Gardens continue with a core objective of maintaining and beautifying the grounds, educating the public and researching the ecology, evolution and conservation of plants and animals, including Gibraltar's endemic plants. Improvements to the Gardens' aesthetics are ongoing and the very hard and enthusiastic work of the ground staff is clear to see. Most importantly, the Alameda's new bespoke education area, the Alameda Kusuma Education Zone, will be inaugurated this month. This has been fully funded with the contributions of many generous donors and without any government funds whatsoever. It is a large and exciting new facility at which to educate the public, especially children. It is already being used by visiting groups including schools.

Madam Speaker, the presence of our environmental protection officers at sea matters. It improves the protection of our marine resources and challenges those who do not respect our laws. I am pleased to say that in the last year we have managed to secure a new vessel for the Department's Protection and Research Unit, aptly named *Osprey*, a species of fish eagle that once nested on our eastern cliffs and still occurs on migration and in winter. This has made a significant difference to our deployment capabilities to how we are viewed at sea. From pollution monitoring to wildlife rescue and marine enforcement, the section is now better equipped to deal with the varied environmental scenarios that can quickly develop at sea and also on land.

Gibraltar is now part of the UK's Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network for improving our understanding of the marine environment. This is a UK-funded blue belt project, which has

provided a full set of baited remote underwater video systems for a number of UK Overseas Territories, including Gibraltar.

350 The Department of Environment continues to be a project partner with the University of Gibraltar. The Department has assisted the University in carrying out a UK Darwin-funded project – again UK Darwin funds, no local funds – which is a feasibility study for the restoration of oyster beds in our waters; a project that we kickstarted in 2016.

355 Another worthwhile project in which the Department has been involved is an ecological assessment of Windmill Hill flats. This area is a vital component of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve and the project aims to assess the state of key biodiversity elements, pressures affecting them and the valuation of the prospect of bringing back lost species. The project is led by my old friend Dr Julia Fa, and it has been wonderful to once again work with this extremely well-regarded Gibraltarian scientist.

360 The Nautilus project has also been successful in obtaining funding from the Darwin Programme for a seagrass restoration project, another restoration initiative that the Department has been promulgating for some time, with initial trials carried out some years ago with the University of the Algarve. Once again, I am certain that the collaboration between the Department and the Nautilus project will ensure that this new project is a success for the benefit of Gibraltar's coastal biodiversity. The highly exemplary marine monitoring, research and education work carried out
365 by Nautilus must be highlighted and praised. Their tentacles continue to grab the attention of many within Gibraltar, especially the young, and the research work is gaining increased recognition internationally.

I will, at this juncture, also thank the two other environmental NGOs for their excellent work.
370 GONHS continues to monitor migration and survey habitats, performing high-quality scientific work as well as promoting awareness. The Environmental Safety Group continues its valuable contribution to awareness and environmental governance, not least in its annual Clean Up the World event.

The innovative concept of the Gibraltar National Park goes from strength to strength, and many
375 will have seen the new branding displayed on our electric fleet and the staff uniforms of the constituent bodies. The National Park Co-ordinating Board has continued to meet, with ideas shared on how all the different entities and sites that make up the National Park can unite and improve. This will not only give a different dimension to our sites but also improve what Gibraltar has to offer to the modern traveller.

380 Madam Speaker, visitors continue to marvel at the natural beauty of our Rock and its offerings, so it should come as no surprise to this House that visitor numbers for the Upper Rock component of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve have increased by 27% from the last financial year. I predicted last year that further system enhancements would be able to increase revenue by a further £1 million in the 2023-24 financial year. I can now confirm that the actual increase has been a staggering
385 £3.06 million. This equates to an almost 45% increase in revenue from the previous financial year. Figures for the months of April and May suggest that we will see a further increase of £1.5 million in the 2024-25 financial year, and I am aiming to achieve at least double that, but we must remember that with increased tourism comes a greater need to become more environmentally conscious, or we risk losing the essence of what visitors come to enjoy.

390 Diversifying the experience we have to offer within the Upper Rock, and indeed around Gibraltar, forms one of the cornerstones of our sustainability strategy for the future. In achieving this, my Ministry is working extremely closely with that of my friend the Minister for Tourism, and great progress is being made. We remain hopeful that working together with industry we will be able to ensure that the Upper Rock, indeed the whole Gibraltar experience, continues to improve
395 and is not choked by its own success. To this end we have, for example, recently introduced the alternative tour, promoting the many sites in Gibraltar outside the Upper Rock. We need to provide more and better options, and one of those is Gibraltar's World War II Tunnels. A testament to the Rock's strategic significance during the conflict, this site is undergoing a remarkable transformation to offer an immersive and enlightening world-class experience for

400 visitors, totally done through private investment. Plans are also underway to create a new
breathtaking artery into the Reserve via the lower Charles V Wall steps and Devil's Gap Battery.
This site will also see a transformation with the creation of a new ticket office and interpretation
centre. Additional facilities will also be available that will favour the more adventurous traveller
405 in sustainable savings once again. We will shortly be able to announce another major initiative
that will at long last see our Moorish Castle restored.

The Upper Rock is a tourist destination, an area for our recreation, and also, we must not
forget, a nature reserve. It is thanks to our intimate knowledge of habitats and the requirements
of species that allows the Department of Environment to provide both a tourist product for our
410 colleagues in the Tourist Ministry to promote and market, and a refuge for wildlife. This tight
partnership between our Departments is unique and most effective, and so we have seen the
population of Barbary partridges, rabbits and red foxes flourish, ravens recolonise, sparrowhawks
winter and booted eagles summer at the same time that human visitor numbers increase. This is
no mean feat and not everyone can do it. We can, because we know exactly what we are doing
415 and how to do it.

Work on simpler things that make a difference, such as improving the condition of trails and
signage in the Upper Rock along with other parts of the Nature Reserve, have continued.
Mediterranean Steps stand out, as usual, with works carried out in the spring making a difference
and completed just in time for the annual Med Steps Challenge. I must thank the contractors and
420 the Reserve management team for their work. In addition, we have recently installed signs to
mark our National Trails Network. This project is ongoing and we expect to open up additional
trails soon, such as Devil's Tooth.

Madam Speaker, the population of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar needs to be controlled
because the birds have an ecological impact on habitats and other species, cause nuisance to the
425 public when nesting in town, can be a public health problem and, most importantly, they
constitute a risk for aircraft. The trend of yellow-legged gulls in Gibraltar continues to be one of
significant decline, as evidenced by scientific surveys. The Avian Control Unit thus continues to do
excellent work providing an excellent service to the public. The Bird of Prey Unit, manned jointly
430 by the Department and GONHS, continues its excellent work in rescue, rehabilitation, release and
tracking of injured birds. They do excellent conservation work and are also very involved in
education, which includes a good social media presence, which helps to highlight Gibraltar's
conservation efforts both locally and internationally.

Barbary macaque management continues to maintain a stable population size of around 200
animals. Laparoscopic sterilisation has kept births down sufficiently to maintain social structure
435 and yet stop a population explosion like we had in the 1990s. Our continued investment in ponds
and supplementary feeding, coupled with a macaque team that responds rapidly to any
incursions, has resulted in the macaques staying within the boundaries of the Nature Reserve –
except when one particular individual decided to travel north. Once again, the expertise of our
team, led by vet Mark Pizarro, proved its worth, and Gibraltar continues to be proud to have the
440 only wild, free-ranging, non-human primates in Europe, now well managed, and the tourism that
it attracts.

Madam Speaker, when I became Minister for the Environment in 2011, the gulls and macaques
were rampant and the Barbary partridge on the verge of extinction. All three of these situations
have been completely reversed. I can also report, thanks to the observations of volunteers from
445 GONHS, that this year we have had seven pairs of peregrine falcon holding territory which have
raised a total of 10 young, six pairs of kestrels raising a minimum of 13 young, as well as four pairs
of little owl, a pair of eagle owls and a pair of ravens raising 4 young, ravens having recolonised
the Rock last year following an absence of four decades.

Sadly, all is not rosy and we have had an unacceptable number of road kills this year. This has
450 included cats, foxes and an otter. The latter is quite incredible. We were aware of an otter in the
Port area for over a year but the one killed was a different young one, possibly a sign of attempted

colonisation of our waters. As a result of these events, I brought a Bill to Parliament in relation to the need to report roadkill of these species. Drivers have to be vigilant. As our wildlife flourishes, thanks largely to our environmental policies, we have to be aware that we are not the only species using our roads.

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Madam Speaker, the Department of Environment supports my work as Chair of the Environment Ministers Council of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The Council meets virtually, at least once a year. It serves to exchange experience and expertise as well as to co-ordinate the territories' positions on matters to be taken up with the Government of the United Kingdom. While on the subject of international representation, it might interest this House to know that as a founder member of the Global Council for Political Renewal, I was named the first Vice-Chair of its Council for Environment and Equitable Development and I recently chaired a meeting of that Council. I was also honoured to represent the Chief Minister at Gibraltar Day in London just days after the General Election and address the dignitaries there on behalf of Gibraltar.

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Moving away from Environment, for the first time ever, Gibraltar has a Minister with specific responsibility for developing relations with the Kingdom of Morocco – and how proud I am to have this opportunity. Morocco has always held a special place in my heart, having regularly visited in my childhood and having enjoyed many hours in environmental research there. Those of us who are old enough to remember will recall gratefully the invaluable support that Morocco provided during the closed-frontier years, particularly the workforce that assisted and filled the void in craftsmanship in Gibraltar on the closure of the Frontier and the withdrawal of the Spanish workforce. I have been establishing links with entities in Morocco, directly and through other players such as the Gibraltar-Morocco Business Association, RifCom, Taourarte Association and Maroc Atlas. Her Worship the Mayor has signed a memorandum of understanding and co-operation with the Mayor of Tangier, and we have had a visit from Moroccan NGOs. I will be travelling to Morocco in the autumn to further contacts and discussions with a view to promoting our links and developing new ones. At the same time, I have made it a point to engage closely with my friends in the Gibraltarian Moroccan community. I have held several clinics in recent months and will continue to do so, acting as a conduit to other colleagues, and I will assist members of the community in any way that I can.

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Closer to home, I have the privilege of being the constituent MP for the South District, which offers me an opportunity for on-the-ground engagement, listening to concerns, suggestions and solutions from residents in the area and to discuss matters of interest to them. I have held two town hall-type meetings, where some important issues have been raised. These provide an open forum where the voice of the citizen is heard and they can freely contribute to decisions that may have an impact on their lives. It offers a link between the citizen and government bodies, working together for the benefit of the area and proving a very effective way for all of us in government to keep in touch with the people and channel ideas and issues of concern to the appropriate colleague, and it is making a real difference.

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Madam Speaker, I would now like to turn to Heritage. Archaeological monitoring, restoration, heritage assessments and technical advice are consistently being done and further improved. The Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council continues to thrive, providing me with valuable guidance on all heritage-related matters. Enhancements to the Heritage and Antiquities Act are evident in the recent addition of our first private property to schedule 2, the main and northern façade of the former Central Police Station at Irish Town. This showcases our continuous efforts in bolstering protection, sensitive urban renewal, legislation and policy. Our strong collaboration with private property owners has played a crucial role in achieving this milestone.

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In April last year we declared Gibraltar's first archaeological site outside Gorham's Complex, in Arengo's Gardens. Our published heritage vision has transformed into a policy document which commits us to carrying out its recommendation during the life of this Parliament. The distribution of interpretation panels across Gibraltar continues to yield positive results and we have planned

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to instal additional panels that delve into the historical significance of various areas, all of which serve to improve the visitor experience.

505 I am excited to announce a new heritage initiative. This is the placing of informative content about significant individuals from our history, spanning ancient times to the 20th century. Through the installation of these memorials, we aim not only to honour our shared past but also to showcase the valuable contributions made by these individuals.

510 We have partnered with the Naval Museum of Madrid to reproduce the 17th century City of Gibraltar model, which is currently housed in the Spanish capital. This meticulously crafted replica shows the city and its fortifications as they stood prior to the devastating Great Siege, a significant part of our history that remains unseen by many Gibraltarians, and we aspire to exhibit it permanently in Gibraltar.

515 Collaborative efforts are ongoing as the Ministry for Heritage, the Heritage Trust and Alabaré – a UK charity – have once again come together, for the third year running, to enhance our military assets. In May they continued the work on Lord Airey’s Battery. The American War Memorial has also been further improved and restored through another joint project with the American Battle Monuments Commission. The Ministry for Heritage is also collaborating with the former members of the Royal Naval Reserve Unit *HMS Calpe*, to commemorate their valuable contribution to
520 Gibraltar.

The Ministry’s website, which was launched nearly three years ago, continues to be a formidable research tool, constantly being added to. We have introduced a new feature which allows users to take a virtual tour of Nuns’ Well directly from their devices. This includes the whole of the Nun’s Well, including the second chamber and the landscape areas. More virtual tours are
525 planned, further enhancing the experience by offering new, exciting opportunities for those, for example, with mobility issues. By the end of this year, we will have a Register of Historic Buildings, enabling both the public and professionals to access information on our historic properties.

The Southport Gate restoration project was concluded last year, the first instance in over a century that such extensive efforts were undertaken on our city gates. The restoration project at
530 St Mary’s School has also been completed, with its iconic façade now enhancing the overall townscape; a wonderful demonstration of successfully blending traditional and modern elements. Restoration efforts are ongoing at significant locations like the Convent façade and the outer wall of the Moorish Castle complex along Castle Ramp. We are set to undertake significant projects focused on heritage restoration throughout the duration of this parliamentary term, including
535 parts of the Moorish Castle, the Sikorski Memorial, Eastern Beach World War II bunkers and the Southport Gate sentry gun post. The Ministry of Heritage, in collaboration with GJBS has also completed the production of new gun carriages that will be positioned at the Grand Battery Artillery Park.

As I have alluded to already, it is crucial that we prioritise the preservation of more intangible
540 heritage, like our indigenous languages. We are dedicated not only to protecting them but also to actively encouraging their use. This will ensure that both Gibraltarians and visitors can experience the rich multilingual culture of Gibraltar. In coming months, the Ministry has plans to increase the Llanito street name signs across Gibraltar, reminding us of our past. Collaborative efforts with the UK are being made to expand the UNESCO Convention of Intangible Heritage to include Gibraltar.
545 I want to express my appreciation for the efforts of the organisations dedicated to promoting our languages, in particular Gibraltarians for a Multilingual Society, who have forged a strong partnership with the Ministry for Heritage. I trust that the community will rally behind these efforts to safeguard our languages, as it is in the best interests of all individuals to enhance the language proficiency. Anyone who perceives it as a threat is disregarding our history, as well as
550 the rich cultural legacy passed down by our ancestors. How I wish these thoughts would have been in our community when Genoese and Maltese were spoken in our streets, and how wonderfully multilingual we would have been now.

An essential yet often overlooked aspect of the Ministry for Heritage responsibilities involves conducting archaeological supervision via watching briefs, which is done on a wide number of projects.

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Moving on to the Gibraltar National Museum, it continues to go from strength to strength. Last October, I was pleased to open the Natural History Museum at Parson's Lodge, the first time since the museum opened in Bomb House Lane in 1930 that a new museum had been opened in Gibraltar. A rewilding project to reintroduce Hermann's tortoises is one of the activities of the new museum, in collaboration with Zurich University. This has become the latest component in the strong educational programme that is carried out by the museum, and also includes a facility at Gorham's Cave at Europa Advance. Part of the educational and outreach programme is the annual open day, which this year saw 700 visitors. The annual excavations at the Gorham's Cave Complex start next Sunday and will continue until the end of August. I know that the museum team is excited about returning to the Neanderthals' Grotto, a new site discovered last summer and which had been occupied by Neanderthals 100,000 years ago.

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This year's Calpe Conference takes place later this week on the subject of 'Islands in the Sun'. One intriguing aspect that is emerging from the research being carried out in Gibraltar reveals a connection between Gibraltar and its surrounding hinterland and the offshore Atlantic islands. I have personal knowledge from my own research and I am really looking forward to the event, which opens in a couple of days' time. Looking ahead, I can advance that next year the Calpe Conference will focus on the Second World War, appropriately on the 80th anniversary of the end of the war. I can advance even further, such is the planning that goes into these conferences, that the 2026 conference will be a major event highlighting the Neanderthals, as it will be the 100th anniversary of the discovery of the Gibraltar child's skull at Devil's Tower rock shelter.

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I am also pleased to announce that the museum is now planning to further develop and intensify its publication programme. It is difficult to keep pace with all the new discoveries, so we are to expect many of these chapters of our history, some already published in academic journals, to be made available to a wider audience.

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The close working relationship with the Gibraltar Heritage Trust continues. As ever, there is mutual support between the Trust and the Ministry on day-to-day work and projects. Witham's Cemetery works are also continuing on the cottage and interpretation centre with government support. We share with the Trust the belief that interest in heritage and concern for the proper care and maintenance of heritage continue to be strong in the community, with high expectations for its conservation.

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The Gibraltar Garrison Library hit a milestone in 2023 with the commencement of its 230th anniversary, marked with a year-long programme of events starting in August. Not enough is said about the heritage aspects of paper conservation, as attention is often drawn towards bricks and mortar when books and paper are far more vulnerable to the passage of time. A key part of this year, therefore, has been the establishment of a scanning studio for the digitisation of the newsprint archives held at the library, and the creation of a repository; all very generously funded through a grant from the Kusuma Trust. Here we see how digital output will assist in preserving the paper copies, which will be less handled once digitised.

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The structural and systematic enhancements implemented by this Government have enabled heritage matters to be at the forefront of government policy. The enthusiasm and dedication are evident, as is the fact that we are the sole political assemblage in Gibraltar that listens and has a clear vision and the commitment to safeguard all facets of our heritage, whether tangible or intangible.

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Madam Speaker, in October I was given responsibility for traffic and transport. I have come to find it both fascinating and challenging, and I am relishing the opportunity to make real improvements on the ground once the House votes the Appropriation Bill through. Among the work being done by the small but dedicated Ministry of Transport team is a review of the Sustainable Traffic Transport and Parking Plan (STTPP) produced by my predecessor, the Hon. Paul Balban, in order to update it, incorporating the principles of the Active Travel Strategy

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605 and the Climate Change Strategy. This work is well advanced and I expect to publish the update
by the end of the year. Other current initiatives on which we are working include the review of
the Climate Change Strategy transport chapter and a vehicle scrappage scheme which will
incentivise replacement and not penalise retention.

The Ministry has carried out several projects during the year: the new bicycle lane running from
610 the southern airport barrier towards the Sundial Roundabout via Bayside Road, opened by my
predecessor a year ago last month, totalling close on 900,000 trips in the first year. This was
Gibraltar's first dedicated cycle lane, other than Kingsway, and a proud moment for the former
Transport Minister, who called it a transport milestone for Gibraltar, which indeed it was.

Following feedback from bicycle e-cargo bikes and PLET users, in July of last year the
615 Government announced the demarcation of trial e-scooter and bicycle hubs and bays at
approximately 60 locations. These have proved popular with locals and tourists alike. The Ministry
is continuously monitoring the use of these areas in order to carry out improvements where
necessary, and has published a Bill that aims to clarify conditions governing the use of PLETs.

In October last year, phases 2 and 3 of the cycle lane from Ocean Spa Plaza to Watergardens
620 were opened. Further cycle lanes will be provided this coming year to extend the network, some
to be funded privately by developers nearby, and planning is well advanced. We see the
promotion of cycling as key to both our environmental and travel policies, and this must be done
sensibly and taking into account the interests of all road users. Pedestrians will, of course,
continue to take priority, and this year we will see promotion of walking routes around Gibraltar.

625 Madam Speaker, during 2023 the Traffic Commission met a total of six times, reviewing 104
items. So far this year, the Commission has met four times, reviewing 61 items. In November, I
published the Climate Change (Idling of Motor Vehicles) Regulations which make it an offence to
idle within a signposted area. No-idling zones have been introduced around schools and will be
630 extended to other areas around Gibraltar. Idling significantly increases emissions, with negative
effects on the environment and on human health, and around schools these harmful gases are
released close to the height of the children, who will breathe them in directly. I have met with
companies that operate coaches, heavy goods vehicles and private buses and we are working
together, both to establish sites where HGVs can park, and to change their vehicles for lower-
emission vehicles. I hope to develop plans during the coming year and I am very excited about the
635 progress we are making.

Finally on transport, I want to thank the team of professionals at the Ministry for their
knowledge and expertise and for their work. We are bringing modern thinking and dynamism into
the equation to capitalise on a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to deliver the city of the future, and
I am looking forward to the community benefitting from what we are collectively planning.

640 Madam Speaker, this portfolio is a large one and it includes the Driver and Vehicle Licensing
Department, which we all know as DVLD. We are carrying out a full review of the Department as
it continues doing all the necessary amendments to legislation and additional requirements in the
exchange of driving licences, which has proved challenging, and DVLD is working with the Gibraltar
office in Brussels to obtain necessary agreements with EU countries.

645 In line with the manifesto commitment, DVLD will focus on promoting sustainable
transportation and will work towards modernising our approach to vehicle inspection. DVLD is
working to introduce a fully online service, user friendly to all service users as well as to staff. The
user will have access to their profile, by which they will be able to apply for all our services online.
The Department continues to provide an express next-day service to local dealers for new
650 registrations, duplicate certificates etc., and we are gradually introducing this service for the
general public, which will help individuals requiring their vehicle registration urgently.

DVLD managed to secure the reconnection of the European Car and Driving Licence
Information System (EUCARIS), and we are now in the process of signing an agreement with each
EU member state to be able to access and share information on the vehicle, driver registration
655 and licence exchange. In 2023, DVLD welcomed the introduction of the new penalty points system.

It is now endorsing fixed penalty points on drivers' licences and the benefits are noticeable, encouraging safer driving as the threat of penalty points motivates drivers to be more cautious.

660 Madam Speaker, I am working very closely with the Gibraltar Taxi Association in order to improve the taxi service across the board. I want to thank Luis Debono and his committee for their very positive and forward-looking engagement. In particular, thanks to some legislative changes on which we have been working together and with the Transport Commission, the taxi city service is improving its efficiency and reliability and extending its hours into the night with the assistance of our transport inspectors, who monitor and oversee the service. I am very pleased to announce that next week Gibraltar's taxi service will be launching an Uber-type app that will allow booking
665 as well as tracking of taxis, increasing the availability, reliability and efficiency of managing the service. I want to congratulate the Taxi Association for this initiative. Gibraltar has, now, three electric taxis in its fleet and specific charging points are being provided for them.

The transport inspector team provides cover on the ground to police transport-related activity throughout Gibraltar. Their duties include overseeing our taxi and bus services and they oversee
670 the provision of the taxi city service throughout the year and ensure that all permits to access pedestrianised areas, particularly those accessed by commercial vehicles, are adhered to. The inspectors, with the approval of the Transport Commission and the support of the Taxi Association, have recently implemented a three-strike warning to any driver or licence holder who fails to comply with the Transport Act. They have also recently implemented a dress code for all
675 drivers to abide by, so as to improve appearance and have uniformity among all taxi drivers. I would like to take the opportunity to thank the entire DVLD for their hard work. They continue to provide a good and efficient service to the public and always seek to improve the services provided.

Gibraltar Car Parks continues to provide for the day-to-day management of parking; not an
680 easy task, and one they address diligently. A number of projects have been undertaken this past year which will improve the service. These have included a new top floor at Eastern Beach car park, opening the ground floor of Devil's Tower car park to residents of the North District and provision of a new pay and display area near the Prison.

Talking about public buses, new bus stops to cater for changes in demographics are under way
685 as we aim to promote improvements to travel. In March, the Ministry of Transport set up a new bus stop at Hassan Centenary Terraces, heading towards the city centre. School bus S8 had its route revamped and now also serves this bus stop and others along Devil's Tower Road, so more schoolchildren are able to use the school bus while also allowing more space for commuters. We have also improved the South District school bus service. The encouragement and further use of
690 more sustainable transport forms such as public transport is part of the Government's Climate Change Strategy and Active Travel Strategy, and so we will have continuous revision and upgrades to the current bus service.

The new Upper Town bus tender was published just a few weeks ago and we will be providing
695 new, cleaner engines to some of the fleet to extend their life. We are also encouraging and assisting private bus operators and transport companies to replace older, polluting vehicles with newer, more environmentally friendly commercial vehicles. We will be acquiring a new ticketing system, which will lead to faster issuing of tickets and better gathering of data, and within a few weeks all our buses will be able to accept card payments.

I want to thank everyone at the Bus Company for making me feel so welcome during my visits
700 and for the work that they do to keep the buses rolling, providing such an important service as an alternative to the use of personal vehicles. We have an excellent bus service to be proud of, thanks to the work of the drivers, support staff and management, and working together we will continue to make significant improvements.

Madam Speaker, yet another recently acquired portfolio is Infrastructure and the Technical
705 Services. I have set up regular Infrastructure co-ordination meetings to ensure collaboration between all Departments and Agencies, to maximise efficiency of work and minimise disruption to the public. Areas where I have co-ordinated Infrastructure meetings include Bayside and the

710 Upper Rock. The Department has continued to provide technical support to government Ministries and Departments on a wide range of construction and traffic matters, as well as meeting their responsibility to maintain public infrastructure. Projects have included extensive tunnel repairs in Keightley Way Tunnel, the repair of retaining walls, critical highways infrastructure, maintenance, as well as general sewer maintenance and improvement works. In addition, it provides support to the implementation of projects related to the STTPP.

715 On highways maintenance, the works programme has once again been successful with ongoing repairs to roads, footpaths and retaining walls. The team of highways inspectors carries out regular inspections of all our roads and footpaths and reacts to reports received from the public. In addition, with approval from the Traffic Commission, it has installed a number of traffic calming measures on various roads in an effort to improve vehicle and pedestrian safety.

720 This year will see the continuation of our comprehensive road surfacing scheme. Over the last few years, a very significant number of roads have been resurfaced and this was progressed further during the last year with over 13,200 square metres being done. Funding in the order of £1 million has been included in this year's Estimates, reflecting our commitment to ensure continuing works to our road network. The replacement and enhancement of pelican crossing lights and equipment will continue during this year, jointly with the GEA, and the Department will
725 continue to review all existing light-controlled crossings and provide further countdown timers in areas where these are required.

Regarding coastal engineering, TSD continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair work. The Department also continues to provide advice to developers and the DPC on aspects of coastal engineering. During this financial year, the TSD will be reviewing the existing defences at
730 Eastern Beach and Sandy Bay. The Department has been involved in schemes including stabilisation works at Laguna, Sir Herbert Miles Road and the Upper Rock. There is continuous work carried out to minimise the risk and impact of rockfalls, and this coming year works will be carried out to repair and upgrade some of our rock catch fences. During the last year, works have also been done to a number of retaining walls in various parts of Gibraltar.

735 Moving to sewers, the Infrastructure section of the Department continued to maintain the public sewerage network as part of the major desilting and relining works on the main sewer commenced several years ago. The section relined a further 100 m of the main sewer along the north end of Line Wall Road, meaning that to date approximately 70% of the main sewer within the city walls has been relined. As part of this project, TSD also cleaned and desilted some 400 m
740 of the main sewer. While on the subject, I am hopeful that following the tender the current work with the preferred bidder, which is progressing well, will progress quickly now and allow us to finally proceed with our wastewater treatment plant.

745 Finally, funding is once again being allocated for the purchase of equipment for the Sewer Infrastructure section, and the Garage and Workshop, which continues to provide a service to maintain the fleet of government vehicles, including the refuse-collection vehicles. I intend, this year, to complete the review of both the Garage and Workshop and the Technical Services Department as a whole, to make its operation more focused, efficient and effective.

I would like to take the opportunity to publicly thank the Infrastructure section and on-call officers and the whole of TSD for their hard work and commitment during those times in the past
750 year when Gibraltar has suffered from storms and very heavy rain. It is thanks to the dedication of this team, while most of us are at home, that the impact of these storms is not greater on both our sewerage and road networks. TSD is one of those Departments that is rarely in the limelight but works tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on their wide responsibility and also actively supports other key projects for the Government, including support to the Chief Technical Officer
755 in the delivery of reclamation works at Coaling Island.

I will now move to Education, the last of my responsibilities to report on. Nicholas Alexander Ferroni is big on 'X'. In his profile, he writes, 'As a kid, I wanted to be a superhero, psychologist, philanthropist, philosopher, actor and comedian, so I became a teacher.' How well that statement fits what a teacher is, the profession with which I have the pleasure to

760 work so closely and which I have grown to respect and love even more over the almost eight years
that I have been Minister for Education. Twentieth-century writer Elias Canetti wrote of a child,
‘His head is made of stars, but not yet arranged into constellations.’ It is teachers who will help
the child to arrange those stars into shining constellations and will make stars of our children. It is
an absolute privilege to work in Education and a tremendous responsibility. Our policies and our
765 actions will have a lasting effect on the children of the present and the adults of the future.

This Government has totally transformed education. When I see in the media the deteriorated
state of schools in the UK, the difficulties families there have even in getting their children into
schools nearby – sometimes having to travel eight hours there and back, and we panic when our
children get sent to St Mary’s instead of Governor’s Meadow – I am reminded of just how lucky
770 we are here and what an outstanding education system we have. All this thanks to the vision and
commitment of GSLP and GSLP Liberal Governments.

The Department of Education is a very large Department with 1,519 employees. This, together
with the expanse and complexity of the estate and the large number of pupils under our care –
6,321 at the latest count, plus the 1,133 sponsored students on scholarships – means that we look
775 after nearly 9,000 members of our community. It also means that our budget has to be prudently
managed to ensure the appropriate financial investment is directed towards all the elements of
our complex requirements.

Our core responsibility is to ensure that our 16 schools and educational settings provide
welcoming, safe, nurturing spaces for the children and young people. We strive to make certain
780 that our learning framework across these settings supports children in a holistic manner so that
they develop a wide range of skills that will enable them to contribute positively to society now
and in the future. As never before, we endeavour to personalise learning to meet each child and
young person’s needs, and we work with partner agencies to ensure equitable access to learning
and to direct specific specialist professional support, where that is required. We aspire to facilitate
785 the realisation of each individual child’s potential, so that they complete a broad set of
qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and can continue their journey into Key Stage 5 and beyond
into higher education, if so desired. We acknowledge that if we succeed – through our buildings,
staff, practical resources, ethos and procedures – in creating learning environments which are
secure and stimulating, children and young people will have the best chance to achieve happiness
790 and success, whatever their academic abilities may be.

Throughout a pupil’s school journey, we strive to develop self-awareness and promote future
pathways appropriate to each individual’s strengths and attributes, so that we can support their
subsequent entry into the world of work. This includes addressing the needs of individuals who
require a supported employment placement. This has not always been the case, and this
795 educational philosophy, with which I personally associate, has developed and been nurtured over
the past decade by the amazing teaching professionals in our schools. This pupil-centred ethos
was beautifully demonstrated at St Mary’s Lower Primary this term, when, as well as a sports day,
which plays to the skills of some pupils, they had an arts day and a STEM day, giving the chance to
pupils with other skills to showcase. It is just one example that I happened to attend recently, but
800 the principle is widespread in our schools.

I am now going to list, briefly, some performance highlights. We have reviewed many aspects
of the scholarship process, including the establishment of key working practices and the
implementation of a scholarship handbook.

We have digitised all public-facing forms and processes, increasing efficiency and improving
805 the experience of stakeholders.

We have established and embedded a revised approach to catchment areas for our schools,
using GIS.

We have established focused, whole-service CPD days during which all 1,000-plus Education
staff come together on the same site to partake in developmental opportunities and cross-sector
810 dialogue.

We are continuing our focus on training staff to develop skills in supporting children with social, emotional and mental health needs.

We are continuing our proactive ethos in nurturing well-being, so that all children are better equipped to face adverse life situations.

815 We have worked on the development of an attendance strategy through a focused working party, with the aims of raising awareness in the community and further embedding processes and strategies to address poor attendance.

We have continued to embed safeguarding practices through training, consultative processes, professional meetings and targeted training.

820 Staff well-being is high on our agenda, as it is an important aspect of our strategic investment in supporting children and young people.

We have ensured equity of provision across the secondary sector: boys and girls now do exactly the same and have exactly the same opportunities.

825 We work outside the box to personalise programmes for children and young people who are not able to engage meaningfully within the mainstream provision, and we are happy to give them numerous chances and repeat opportunities in order to support their journey.

We champion pupil and staff well-being needs and have consolidated occupational health and mental health support pathways for our employees.

We continue to invest in training teachers to best adapt to the evolving National Curriculum.

830 We are supporting the training of early career teachers with a tiered mentorship support structure.

We provide experienced mentoring to PGCE students in the University of Gibraltar.

In the long-term, we aim to develop a more equitable TLR structure in schools and to ensure that workload is fairly remunerated across all schools.

835 We have transformed the middle leadership and management structure of St Martin's School through a revamp of the teaching structure. This has already enhanced the provision significantly, with the tiered leadership and management structure now increasingly being able to strategically plan for and respond to the large pupil and staff cohorts.

840 We will have an educational psychology traineeship in place next academic year, which will help us double the complement of this much-needed profession.

We will continue to positively review the role and remuneration of SENCos, school counsellors and other non-teaching staff.

845 We are actively looking at more purposeful organisational leadership and management structure for the Gibraltar College, which will be informed by the plans for the new College and the developments in curriculum towards which we are striving.

850 Madam Speaker, given the increase in supported needs children (SEND) in our schools, I commissioned a study into the likely causes of this increase, which we published several months ago. I want to thank Director of Public Health Dr Helen Carter and author of the report Una Geary for the time and focus dedicated to the study, and all the individuals who participated. We have looked carefully at the recommendations of the report, especially those that have a direct correlation with the work we have responsibility for within Education, and are reviewing what we currently do and exploring ways in which we can continue to address these issues within our school settings.

855 In order to support pupils with SEND in an increasingly inclusive manner, last September we opened new learning support facilities (LSFs) catering for nursery and reception-age pupils in our lower primary schools. We also increased the vocational courses on offer at the Gibraltar College so that young people have an extended range of opportunities. This coming September we will be opening another LSF in St Bernard's Upper Primary School to further develop our provision in this regard. Having LSFs in the majority of our schools increases the opportunity for children on
860 outreach programmes to attend their catchment school and supports our promotion of inclusive practices. We have linked up with a special school in the UK which recently received an

outstanding Ofsted report, and will continue to develop a contact network within this specialist field.

865 Many of the other things we have in place to support pupils with SEND are still the same and ongoing, including continued support for pupils at key times of transition between sectors, enhancing our offer of post-16 provision for young people and inclusion of some of the St Bernadette's users identified as those who will benefit from attending some courses at the Gibraltar College. To this end we are developing our use of technology, visual support and communication aids to more effectively support pupils.

870 Madam Speaker, I have set up two curriculum-focused working parties. One is looking at expanding the vocational provision and endeavouring to develop progressive pathways linked to our community's needs, and the second is looking at our examination and qualification offering and reviewing this in order to establish if any changes should be made. The International Baccalaureate is one possible avenue being studied. The working parties will report back to me at
875 the end of the year.

With regard to new vocational courses, in September 2023 we introduced a City and Guilds Award in Design Craft/Fashion Wear and eSports BTech Level 2 qualifications. Two further vocational courses, the Cambridge International in Sport Studies and the City and Guilds Level 1 Award in Construction, are being offered in September 2024. We plan to establish the Science and
880 IT in-sector and cross-sector working parties and curriculum groups in this coming September to look at further widening the options available.

We have invested and will continue to invest in new hardware devices to enhance the learning experience. This includes new SMART boards, interactive TVs, desktop computers and Spheros robots. We are planning to pilot the use of virtual reality in our schools to further enhance
885 teaching and learning. We have increased the number of iPads available in all schools and will continue to do so with the aim of eventually providing each pupil with an iPad.

Continuous professional development has been arranged to improve the use of the SeeSaw platform, which is used by all primary schools.

890 Working in conjunction with GibSams, £52,000 was donated to mental health projects by CAF. These have been progressed since the last Budget, with many initiatives including trauma communication training, which was delivered to over 400 education staff.

The school counsellor team is fast approaching its fifth anniversary, and it is hard to understand how we coped without them. The service has embedded itself positively into the education system and provides a holistic approach to pupil support, with many children and young people engaging.
895 In September 2023 the team adopted a new database system. It is already becoming evident from the outputs that family or domestic issues are highlighted as a prevalent theme, suggesting that family therapy interventions may be required moving forward. The counselling team has been supporting Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counselling College students by providing guidance and placements in educational settings. We remain committed to increasing the number of school
900 counsellors during the lifetime of this Parliament.

The Department, in collaboration with the Cardiac Association, the GHA, St John Ambulance and the GFRS, have co-ordinated the positioning of five automated emergency defibrillators (AEDs) outside government schools.

895 We have a very close working relationship with many Departments and Agencies, always working together in the best interests of the young in our community. These include the Care Agency, the RGP, Environment, Public Health, the GHA, Industrial Relations, the University of Gibraltar, Personnel and Development, the Youth Service, Equality, the Training Centre, the Gibraltar Law Offices, ITLD, Digital Services, Civil Contingencies and many others across the board, because Education touches everywhere and everywhere wants to support education.

910 With the number of staff and the constraints on time, planning and timetabling that working to strict academic years places upon us, processes that work for other Government Departments do not work as well for Education. For this reason we are overhauling our internal recruitment

framework to ensure a more robust and fair approach to recruiting the best staff, according to school, subject and pupil needs, in a timely manner.

915 We intend to finalise the review of the TLRs and wider leadership and management structure across the service. We endeavour to ensure the implementation of our Department's net zero sectoral plan. We strive to improve attendance levels across our schools. We aim to increase our range of vocational offerings. We aspire to develop more access pathways in our post-16 provision, working with other agencies for learners with more acute learning needs, with the new
920 Gibraltar College facilitating this workstream. We intend to establish a mechanism to increase the Department's visibility over private schools and establish safety and safeguarding regulatory requirements for private nurseries.

Madam Speaker, during the last, and still recent, election campaign I should have charged royalties to my GLSP Liberal running mates for the use of our new schools in most of their speeches
925 at hustings. The truth is that what we have achieved in Education, both in the way that we teach and where we teach, is unbelievable and probably world beating. All of us said during the campaign, 'Ten new schools in 12 years,' when the GSD constructed zero new schools in 16; worse than that, they ran them almost to the ground. It is hard to believe that the latest three new schools were only opened this academic year, just 10 months ago. Already they feel well lived-in
930 and loved, with our magnificent teachers having added their hearts to their professionalism, and with the new Governor's Meadow, Bishop Fitzgerald and St Mary's Schools now thriving in their brand-new sites. *Se dice muy fácil*, but a great deal of work goes into it, and I do not just mean by the contractors. The way we do it is that the detailed preparation, design, selection of equipment, adjustment, correcting and improving are all monitored at a meeting that I chair every two weeks,
935 with the schools' teams, developers, contractors and specialists all involved, thus ensuring that they are exactly what the children need to thrive on their educational journeys. The results are there for all so see. We are now embarking on a similar process in the remaining four schools – Gibraltar College, Hebrew Primary and St Joseph's Upper and Lower – and in the increase in size of provision for St Martin's, all set out in our manifesto. This will bring a great deal of work, but we are experts at new schools now, and I am relishing it.
940

As I have said before, I see the Gibraltar College as the Department of Education institution that will grow and expand more than any other in the near future. One of the successes of the College this year has been in its work on training counsellors, with the UK awarding body, who
945 visited Gibraltar, considering the delivery of the course at the College to be outstanding in quality and achievement. In these days of demands on mental health support, training proper qualified counsellors is critically important and is receiving the support of the GHA, the Care Agency and the Government's well-being team. The College is already expanding its offer, partnering with external bodies like GAMPA, Mayfair on Main and Bassadone Motors. In adult education alone, this year they have held 33 courses with 286 students enrolled across these.

950 Data are key to understanding and informing what we do and how we develop policies. Last year we conducted a survey on vaping, in conjunction with the GRA. We are planning to survey the forms of transport children use to access schools and are working with the University of Gibraltar on the use of electronic devices, including video games, so that we can inform our developing policies.

955 I have mentioned language several times, and I do so again in the context of education. Education has been blamed by some for the alleged loss of the Spanish language element of Llanito. That might have been so when I was in school and when a word of Spanish would be rewarded with a thwack on the hand with a thick leather strap, but that is no more the case. While the language of learning – because of the examinations our students sit – is English, our
960 bilingual/multilingual identity is accepted and indeed encouraged in our schools. I firmly believe that we have caught this in time and saved our linguistic diversity, as exemplified not just by the *villancicos* in our Christmas concerts but by the nurse song sung by many of our schoolchildren where 'Incy Wincy Spider climbed up the spout' has been replaced with '*Incy Winsy araña se fue a la caleta*'. *Si queréis lo canto completo, pero bastante largo es este speech ya*, so I won't.

965 Madam Speaker, some Members of the Opposition seem to enjoy having a go at me for
regularly introducing new legislation. I am, indeed, responsible – I have counted – for close to 300
legal instruments over the past 12½ years, ranging through Health, Public Health, Education,
Environment to Transport and Traffic. I make no apology for this, and indeed I have a lot more in
the pipeline. During the course of the last financial year, both before and after the election, we
970 have totally revamped the Education and Training Act; I thank the Hon. Mr Reyes for co-operating
tremendously on that. I have introduced legislation on environmental governance, heritage, metal
detecting, contaminated land, litter, recycling, vehicle idling, and yes, Mr Clinton, ivory. More
legislation is on the Order Paper to be taken during this or subsequent sessions of Parliament, or
to be published as regulations, covering, for example, animals and road traffic accidents, the
975 keeping of animals, regulation of public service vehicles, restriction of smoking on the Upper Rock,
cycling, control of major accident hazards, genetically modified organisms, nuisances, and PLETS,
and we will publish revised schedules to accompany the Education and Training Act in relation to
nurseries, scholarships and curriculum.

980 Before I conclude – I am getting there – I want to mention my friend and former colleague in
my journey in the Botanic Gardens, Andrew Abrines, who retired recently and was honoured just
two weeks ago by being awarded this year’s prestigious Banksian Medal of the Royal Horticultural
Society: quite an achievement.

I also want to add my personal recognition of the work of my late friend Daphne Alcantara. I
remember that one of my first actions on being elected Minister in December 2011 was to approve
985 the purchase of a new seat for a close relative of Daphne at KGV, which had been denied
previously, a relative with dementia who was being treated in the wrong place and in the wrong
way. We worked very closely together since then to put that right, to develop dementia homes
and dementia care and to provide headquarters for her society. This is just one personal anecdote
but the value of her work, as we all know, extended well beyond and touched many. **(Several**
990 **Members: Hear, hear.)** *(Banging on desks)* I acknowledge the acknowledgement of the
Opposition, because all in this House, I am sure, are as one in remembering Daphne.

Finally, as ever, I wish to express my thanks to all the staff, including my amazing personal
Ministry staff, the best Ministry team that I have ever had, for looking after me; and, of course, to
my Heads of Departments and CEOs, Keri Scott, Emil Hermida, Stephen Warr and Mark Boulton,
995 and their staff for their hard work every day and for their constant support.

Madam Speaker, as I said last year, the administrative staff in my Departments, some of whom
look after sections that are huge in terms of personnel and responsibility, are essential to the
running of the Departments and keeping Gibraltar going. We have increased so much in outcomes
and delivery that sometimes it appears that those in the offices doing the accounts, managing the
1000 leave, preparing the salaries and wages are not appreciated. They most certainly are, and I am
totally committed to recognising and responding to their needs.

My thanks to all the schools, who make me feel so welcome on all my visits; to all the staff in
the agencies, companies and contractors that work to my Departments; to NASUWT, UNITE and
GGCA; to the Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses; to all the NGOs –
1005 environmental, heritage, cycling, too many to list, who are so committed to what they believe in,
often working as volunteers – for being committed, honest and reasonable in pursuing their aims;
to all those many citizens appointed to voluntary commissions, boards, working groups and
committees for which I am responsible; and to those in other Departments with whom I have
regular contact, such as the staff at No. 6, including the Offices of the Chief Minister and the
1010 Deputy Chief Minister, the Chief Secretary – former and current – and staff, the Financial Secretary
and staff, the Chief Technical Officer and his staff, the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator and his
staff, the Director of Personnel and Development and his team, and the Attorney-General and all
at the Gibraltar Law Offices for always being there when I need them. Thanks also to you, Madam
Speaker, and your staff. You have stepped into the role in the way that those of us who knew you
1015 knew you would, with firmness and understanding – not a mean feat, considering what sometimes

transpires here – and, of course, to the Chief Minister, Deputy Chief Minister and my colleagues old and new.

1020 Gibraltar is blessed. No matter what may come our way, we will take it and shape it and emerge all the stronger for it, but to do this we need not just the determination and mettle of the
1025 Gibraltarian but also the vision and leadership of a good government, of *this* Government. Adversarial politics may be fine for some, and I think we will see quite a bit of that over the next few days, but it can get in the way of us seeing that there are times when we need to be united, that we have common enemies who relish the sight of us trying to tear each other apart. We have more important things coming. We have an international audience out there, no doubt monitoring our every word.

I will end by repeating here what I said to an international audience at Gibraltar Day in London's Somerset House. I wondered what the many dignitaries present thought of Gibraltar. Here is what I said:

And I quote, think that it is fair of me to ask, what comes into your mind when you hear the word 'Gibraltar', and to ask you to consider what 'Gibraltar' means to you. Do you think of the majesty of its geology, of the impact of its geography, the importance of its history, from Neanderthal to 20th-century war, of its biodiversity, its location as a focus for migrating birds, its monkeys, even? Or do you see it as a finance centre, an insurance hub, or a tourist destination? It is any of these and all, and many other things besides, such a small place inspiring so many perceptions.

Well, to me, it is home. A home where I was born and raised, under the Union Flag that crowned the Rock, and crowns it still, with freedoms that I took for granted and that for much of my youth were not shared by those who lived but metres away to the north. A home where language and gastronomy do not define and are not defined by sovereignty; a home where art thrives, dance excels and music drifts across our rugged landscape, often dressed in red and white; a home with a growing depth and breadth of literature already making its mark away from our shores.

Distinguished guests, I say all this because, above all, Gibraltar is about Gibraltar, about its identity and about who we, its people, are; a small nation that is like no other – that *is* like no other – that will survive simply because it is. Let everyone remember that!

1030 Madam Speaker, with apologies for the length but with pride as to the content, I too commend the Appropriation Bill to the House.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, may I propose we recess until 4 p.m. today?

1035 **Madam Speaker:** We will recess until 4 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed at 12.36 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 4 p.m. – 8.10 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 2nd July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 4 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Sir Joe Bossano.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker,
5 I had my 85th birthday last month. I have always believed that you are never too old to learn, and
I have learned something new recently from the behaviour of the Members opposite, to which
there is no comparable experience in the 52 years that I have been a Member of the Legislature
or, indeed, during my previous experience of the conduct of local politicians even before I first
stood for election in 1972. Political parties in Gibraltar have traditionally fought elections on the
10 basis of different political programmes by defending that one programme would be more
beneficial to our country than that of the alternative from those contesting the election. This is
what happens in a mature democracy. I have never previously known a political campaign against
one individual candidate conducted by another party to the extent of producing a video urging
voters not to vote for that one person. The GSD produced a video entitled *Don't Vote for Joe* and
15 suggesting that my contribution over 52 years was negated by a quote of 40 years ago which
showed me, as Chief Minister, answering a question from GBC, without the question or the
context of what it was about.

I have learnt something about the sort of people who are now representing the GSD in this
House. By way of example, I will remind Members that in the 2015 Budget they invented the
20 fiction of the existence of two books of recurrent expenditure, which I understand was
Mr Clinton's contribution, and led the policy of voting against all the expenditure of all the
Departments on the false premise that part of the expenditure had been diverted to government
companies in order to show surpluses when they were presumably expecting deficits. They then
concluded that the payment from the annual surplus to the government companies was for this
25 purpose. This entire fiction they repeated year after year. The truth was far simpler. Until 2011
the GSD covered the deficits in government companies by advances from the cash pool, and we
introduced the first payment, in the Budget of 2012, to clear these inherited deficits. The deficits
from all the years after 2012 were predominantly from those government companies which we
inherited, which by definition could only operate with a deficit. As an example, we have the Bus
30 Company, where the annual operating cost exceeds the revenue since the bulk of the passengers
do not pay fares. This year, since the surplus is still not large enough to provide for a contribution
to reduce company deficits, the accounts are being presented in the same way as was done during
the years that the GSD was in government.

A more recent version of the reason for voting against all recurrent expenditure was that given
35 by the Leader of the Opposition when he claimed that the failure to achieve the level of
expenditure voted by Government and Parliament, but not by them, was exceeded by two or

three Departments, which they claimed then meant that we had lied to the electorate because they interpreted, for the first time ever, that the Estimates of Expenditure were binding promises of expected outcomes a year ahead, as if the approved Estimates had now become an exercise of having the ability to know the future.

Madam Speaker, in the 52 years that I have been here, the Treasury has done the same exercise of arriving at a reasonable estimate of expenditure independent of whoever was in government. In arriving at such Estimates and in the context of the golden rule of not borrowing for recurrent expenditure, the Estimates also reflect the anticipated level of income, but that, of course, applies at the level of total income and total expenditure. Within these totals some Departments have a higher priority than others, depending on how essential the public service provided is.

Quite apart from all this, the figures that the Leader of the Opposition quoted to support his argument were all wrong because he did not understand the information in the Estimates, which Mr Clinton tried to cover up when I pointed this out a year later. Therefore, to suggest that the Estimates of Expenditure in that year or, indeed, in any other year previous or subsequent since 1972 have been a set of binding promises made by individual Ministers in respect of their individual departmental responsibilities is the most ridiculous definition of what the Budget entails that has ever been made in this Parliament, and I suspect probably in any other one. What is more, that it should be said by someone who himself has served as a Government Minister implies that he also believes that of himself when he was in government. This is the level of debate we have come to expect.

If we were to come to Parliament with measures to deal with any difficulties that might lie ahead in our relationship with Spain, then I predict that the Leader of the Opposition would claim that any such difficulty would not have happened if he had been in office since Brexit and he had had to deal with the EU – an EU that sold us down the river to Spain, not just in our departure by extracting us from the UK negotiations at the request of Spain but from the very first year of Spain’s membership when they kicked out our Airport from the EU, also at the request of Spain. So, clearly I do not share the identification of the Member opposite of being European meaning being part of the European Union. The concept of being European is simply a geographical concept and not a concept of national identity. We are British Gibraltarians, and we happen to live on the European part of the planet, as does the UK, but there is no such thing as European nationality.

There is one even more fundamental difference between us and them, a fundamental red line that means that the relationship between us and them can only be one of permanent antagonism to each other’s values. This is the incredible attempt to overturn the sovereign right of this Parliament to determine policy by majority vote, representing the democratic choice exercised by our people in a general election. When the Government brought a Bill to this House so that, on it becoming law, a number of words and phrases contained in statements made in the public inquiry in respect of McGrail’s resignation as Commissioner of Police the Members opposite misrepresented the issue and were vehement in opposition to it, which they are entitled to do, but then the Government Members voted in favour and the Opposition voted against, and there was a majority of one.

Between 1972 and until just after 2006 when the new Constitution came in, there was predominantly a majority of one in the elected Members of the Government compared to the Opposition. When we vote this year’s Budget, assuming and now having confirmed that they will continue with their policy of voting against, irrespective of whatever it contains, there will also be a majority of one. So, is it the view of the Opposition that a majority of one is not sufficient for law to be enacted by this Parliament and that they can seek the Governor to overturn the decision of the Parliament and block the legislation, or even go to the Foreign Secretary to ask for the same to happen? This is what the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Clinton and Mr Bossino did in respect of legislation that was designed not to publish individual words in documents that were available to the inquiry but not available to the public, because the advice that we had was that it was potentially capable of damaging security issues. So, because they were against it or because they believed that that was not the case, or because they wanted the general public to believe it, they

90 went to the extent of trying to put our constitutional relationship with the UK back to pre-1954, wiping out all the constitutional advances in the intervening years, for which many elected representatives of our people have fought and won irrespective of their political ideology.

This is the GSD that, after the 2006 Constitution was implemented, argued that we were no longer a colony as a result of it, that there was no need to continue to campaign for self-determination or to hold the Casemates self-determination political rally, that there was no longer a need to participate in addresses in the UN to seek recognition of our right to self-determination, because by implementing the 2006 Constitution we had already exercised self-determination and decolonised ourselves, thereby requiring the UN only to de-list us. Well, as we all know, the GSD did not convince us and did not convince the United Nations, and we continue as a non-self-governing territory.

100 Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition addressed His Excellency the Governor in the last meeting by saying it was more than 40 years, and arguably more than 100 years, since the English and Commonwealth courts recognised that the Crown in a self-governing territory – not a non-self-governing territory – comprises a separate and distinct Crown in the right of that territory. This can only mean one thing: that the Crown is the Crown of the independent Commonwealth countries that are not republics and that, therefore, for self-governing territories we can replace independence and decolonisation. He then claimed that Gibraltar has undoubtedly acquired that measure of self-government.

110 Well, Madam Speaker, if that is what the Leader of the Opposition and the GSD believe, which is what they said in 2006, then His Excellency the Governor is part of the Government of Gibraltar to the same extent as His Majesty the King is part of the Government of the United Kingdom. So, does the Leader of the Opposition here believe that the Leader of the Opposition in the United Kingdom can ask His Majesty the King to overturn legislation approved by the government majority in the UK Parliament?

115 Having compared our level of self-government to that of other Commonwealth countries that have been decolonised, he then went on to suggest the opposite, namely that there was a need for further constitutional reform along the path of self-government. It is self-evident that if we have achieved the level of self-government such that we are no longer a non-self-governing territory – that is, a colony – then the path of self-government is complete. In the same sentence the Member opposite talked about modernising further, a GSD concept that we have never accepted, which equates modernisation with decolonisation, when these are two fundamentally different things.

120 Madam Speaker, speaking to the economy, I want to draw attention to the fact that the last input/output study of the economy was delivered in 2003. An important observation made was that the changes that had been taking place in Gibraltar's economy made it difficult, and to some extent meaningless, to try to make comparisons between 1978, 1998 and the 2000 models. Today we are also at the point where the economy going forward has to be different from the preceding models: firstly, because of the changes in our trading relations since Brexit – we need to remember that the fluidity deal does not create different employment or trading rights; secondly, because the pace of new technology and, in particular, the provision of artificial intelligence is going to fundamentally change the world of work and we need to be ahead of the curve to remain competitive.

130 When it comes to our trading position, the following facts are important. The future economy of Gibraltar cannot be determined by whether there is an agreement this year on access to Schengen for persons and access to the EU single market for goods. This, if it happens, will no doubt impact on the competitiveness of local businesses which could face much tougher competition from the hinterland but is unlikely to affect one way or another the international businesses which are the foundations of our economy, including the work undertaken by the ship repair yard, which is now a fundamental part of the economy and has produced incredibly beneficial results, the best in its history, since it ceased to be one of the five Royal Dockyards. The

140 plans for the expansion of the workload of the dockyard are an important part of Gibraltar's future and count with the full support of the Ministry for Economic Development.

In terms of the possibility of an agreement, as was made clear during the election campaign, it will either be a deal that meets the criteria that have been set out to protect Gibraltar's red lines, or a no deal result. The latest position of the Spanish government, in its statements to the Senate and more recently in La Línea, requires the presence of controls by Spanish officials within our country and thereby describes a no deal result.

The Frontex involvement in the delivery of Spain's obligation under Schengen law to ensure controls on entry into Schengen areas has been proposed and would apply on the basis of the non-binding understanding of December 2020, which allowed negotiations to start in 2021. The limitation of the Frontex presence to four years followed by their departure and replacement by Spanish officials under the Spanish authority working in the terminal on the isthmus reflects, in my view, the expectation by the Spanish government that their presence in our homeland will be less objectionable after four years of Frontex. The red lines now have to be the red lines in four years' time, and the relationship with Schengen would be terminated. Why should that be, Madam Speaker? Because the Spanish view is that the presence of Spanish officers is unacceptable to us because we do not trust Spain, but that our distrust will be eroded by the convenience of free-flowing movement across the international Frontier between us and Spain, across which it would still be the end of Spain, the end of Schengen and the end of the EU territory and the start of the national territory of Gibraltar. Fluidity of movement in and out of Spain will not change the fact that there is a line which demarcates where *our* sovereignty over *our* land begins.

The position is no different from what would happen in any other point of entry of Schengen where there is an agreement for a neighbouring state. The agreement is about movement, not territorial sovereignty. So, a movement into Croatia, for example, is controlled by Croatia, and then, once people are in that territory, they can enter into the Schengen area. In the case of Croatia, nobody is arguing that they cannot control who goes into Schengen. The position here is that Spain says that the isthmus is not part of Gibraltar. However, the law of the European Union applies in La Línea, not on the isthmus, which is subject to Gibraltar law only. Moreover, the fact is that Gibraltar, which is listed as a non-self-governing territory at the United Nations, starts at the international Frontier with La Línea and not at the Casemates Guard House, where we celebrate and carry out the Ceremony of the Keys Parade. In spite of all this, it is still possible for a Schengen state to put in place controls when they feel it is necessary, and this is currently happening. For example, Austria has done so at its border with Hungary and Slovenia.

With this in mind, it is clear that increasing our self-sufficiency and the reduction of our dependence on the hinterland is the only sure strategy that can protect us in the future. It is a strategy that I identified in 2016 when the referendum result was announced, since our experience as EU second-class citizens after the Spanish entry was, in my view, likely to put us at the mercy of Spain in any post-Brexit negotiation. This is exactly what happened when the EU refused our inclusion with the UK in the transitional period and forced us to negotiate separately with Spain after the UK had secured its position, a scenario which has been repeated and is what has happened since the end of the transition in December 2020.

The Members opposite have limited themselves to criticising the Government at the result of any negotiation, even when the incredibly valuable Tax Treaty was signed, which for the first time in our history provided that Spain recognise the separate identity of the Gibraltarian people in an international treaty, which is the first treaty with Spain on Gibraltar since 1713. This incredible recognition by Spain in an international document was something they had repeatedly said at UN seminars they would never accept.

The Leader of the Opposition, in his remarks on the arrival of His Excellency the Governor, used the words 'people' and 'population' as if they meant the same thing. They do not. The people of a non-self-governing territory have a separate and distinct identity; the population of the territory includes the people of the territory and other residents whose nationality is different, who are

not a colonial people with the right to self-determination. Issues that will determine the future of our land have to be decided by those who have the right to our land. There are issues that appear to be of relevance to the economy, but putting the economy at the mercy of a hostile neighbour has to be determined by the Gibraltarians, who have no home other than this Rock.

In 2019 we fought an election where we spelt out the change of direction of our economy following Brexit. It is astonishing that the Members opposite, then or since, have never given an indication whether they agree that this is the direction we need to travel or whether they think there is an alternative, a different national economic plan for our economic structure and the security and future of our land and our people. How can they claim to be ready to govern without saying if they agree on the direction of travel that we have planned for Gibraltar or have an alternative? If the answer to both things is no, then it can only mean that a future Gibraltar that is absorbed by Spain is not something that they are committed to prevent.

The constitutional relationship of Gibraltar with the UK is the least of our worries at this point in time. What we have to address is how we reposition our economy to be able to maintain the level of public services that we have, for which the consumers are not charged because the tax yield from the global companies based here provides sufficient revenue to cover the bulk of the costs. It is the most important task our Government has, and it would be the same for whoever else might be in Government, since it is an externally imposed situation which we have to adapt to, just as we have done in the past when significant changes to the economy took place, just like the GSLP did to adapt the economy during the period 1988 to 1996.

Incidentally, Madam Speaker, when the Leader of the Opposition chooses to draw attention to how small the difference involved between the two sides is in the 2023 elections, he needs to remember the past. Other than the two elections won by the GSLP in 1988 and 1996, when the margin between the Government and the Opposition was 8,000 to 9,000 votes, there has generally been a gap in the low hundreds in every election. Even when it was the result of thousands of votes, in our case, we still had a majority of one in the elected Members. But, of course, the Leader of the Opposition knows all this because he was already involved in politics in those years.

What Gibraltar needs today is an Opposition that is capable of coming up with a strategy for our future economy that is better than ours. If they do not have one, then the Opposition must accept and support our strategy as the way ahead, irrespective of any other issues on which they may disagree. But the basic issue can only be one: where we need to be in the future. Of course, I say this on the premise that there is an awareness that we need to restructure our economy, but perhaps I am mistaken in thinking that, and they are not even aware that this is the position. Perhaps they think that nothing needs to be done to give direction to our economy and that there is no need for a National Economic Plan because the economy will look after itself with no direction. Since they have never set out where they stand on this, it means that the only option for Gibraltar's continued prosperity is what is in our National Economic Plan.

In spite of the size of our economy, we need to try to develop a degree of diversification so that it is not overdependent on a narrow sector of economic activity. To illustrate this by way of example, when we look at the number of air arrivals as an indicator of both tourist and business arrivals but with tourists being the predominant element, we see that in the GSD 15-year period it grew from a level of 40,000 to a high of 61,743 in 2003 and then fell back to 55,619 in 2011, a trend that continued in 2012 at 52,340 persons. After 2012 it started to grow strongly, so that by 2015 it surpassed the highest GSD 2003 level at a new high of 66,735, an extra 5,000 visitors. The growth continued every year until 2019 and peaked at 92,657, almost 31,000 more than the GSD peak of 2003, an all-time high. COVID, in 2020, took the figure down to the level of the 1990s at 44,830, compared to, for example, 41,616 in 1998. The recovery from the COVID economic closedown was followed by an early recovery to 56,567 in 2021 and a further growth to 69,171 in 2022, already above the 2003 maximum under the GSD, and another increase last year to 72,332. However, these fluctuations have not had a corresponding identifiable impact on government revenue that would show a correlation.

The numbers, however, play an important part in the profitability of small local businesses. This sector of economic activity historically has produced a larger spend from day visitors overland than from staying visitors arriving from the UK, simply because of the huge disparity in numbers. Visitors by land in the years 2000-plus were in the region of 7 million to 8 million, increasing in 2010 and 2011 to 11 million. They remained around 9 million to 10 million in 2019 and then the COVID drop brought them down to the 5.34 million level, returning to 7.7 million in 2022 and 8.8 million this year. The fluidity across the Frontier will affect these numbers in the future, and delays in coming to and leaving Gibraltar could become a factor that would make unlikely an increase from this source if the delays reduce visitor time and they have less time to spend here. The spending in our economy in the past has been as follows. From an all-time high of £225 million in 2019 it dropped to £66.5 million in 2020 and has recovered to a level of £190 million last year.

Madam Speaker, the National Economic Plan since 2019 has had a fundamental element, which has been the containment of the size of the workforce, a change from the policy we adopted in 2012 to increase employment, which was similar to the previous administration. The previous administration had a policy, prior to 2012, to increase the size of the workforce. Since then, there has not been a reaction from Members opposite to the change in this economic policy and, in turn, the management of the labour market. We do not know if they are in favour or against the policy we introduced in our 2019 manifesto to deal with the post-Brexit situation. I would remind Members that in line with this policy, we identified as a target a cap, a maximum labour force of 32,000, in the 2019 manifesto and repeated it in last year's manifesto, so it continues to be government policy to curtail the size of the labour market. The reason for this, which I also explained at the time, is that we were no longer targeting increases in GDP but instead we had a new metric, which was GDP per worker as opposed to GDP per resident.

To monitor the impact of the policy, I set out comparators which we had chosen by reference to the performance over a number of years up to 2018-19, the baseline, and the years post this date. From October 2015 to October 2018 the labour market grew by 3,851 employees from a total of 26,144 to 29,995, an average increase per annum of approximately 1,284 workers. From 2018 to 2021, the three years after the new policy, the increase has been 408 in three years, from 29,995 to 30,403. By comparison with the growth of 2018 to 2021, the average per annum now has been 136 instead of 1,284. Taking the four-year period, we have in 2014 to 2018 an increase of 5,573, from 24,422 to 29,995, an average per annum increase of 1,393 workers. In the post-Brexit strategy, from 2018 to 2022, the four-year increase is 1,158; that is, from 29,995 to 31,150, an average per annum of 348.

Coming now to last year's performance, the figures for which have been tabled in this House, we can compare two five-year periods, from 2013 to 2018 and from 2018 to 2023. In the first period it went from 22,907 to 29,995, an increase of 7,088, representing an average annually of 1,418, whereas in the five-year period from 2018, the post-Brexit programme, it has gone from 29,995 to 31,523, an increase of 1,528 over the five years, an annual average in the last five years of 306 per annum. In the first five-year period, the number of frontier workers went from 7,504 in 2013 to 13,654, an increase of 6,150 out of an increased workforce of 7,088. That is 87% of the total increase consisted of frontier workers, whereas the resident worker proportion was 13% of the increase. In the second five-year period, with the new policy objective, the workforce grew by 1,528, and of the increase the frontier workers amounted to 490. That is 32% of the total were non-resident, frontier workers, and 68% of the workforce were the resident workers. In fact, between 2022 and 2023 there was an increase in resident workers of 373, and over the same period a slight drop of six frontier workers in the last year.

The drop in employment in the retail trade sector last year increased productivity, given the increase in visitor expenditure in the year, which went to £258 million from £209 million, a £49 million increase in spending, and at the same time the workforce dropped to 3,573 from 3,599. So, we had 24 fewer workers and a turnover of £49 million more in business. This gives a very clear indication of how, since 2018, based on the policy change of 2019, we have successfully reduced the rate of growth of our dependence on the frontier workers because this makes us

vulnerable to the disruption of our economy if there are delays in coming in to work. The process, however, has only just started because we need to see a reduction in number and not just the dramatic slowdown in the rate of growth.

300 Madam Speaker, I am pleased to inform the House that the Savings Bank is doing very well – maybe to their disappointment – in terms of attracting deposits, and it is likely to exceed the figures in the target we set ourselves in the October General Election. Some 12 months ago, as a result of the high rates of interest set by the Bank of England, commercial banks in Gibraltar introduced very competitive savings with much higher rates of interest than was the case previously. To maintain the competitive position in the local market, the economic development
305 debenture was devised and made available in late August. These were well received, with investor take-up somewhat slow at the beginning. In answer to Question 658/2023, I provided Parliament with the money invested in this product as at the end of September 2023, which came in at just over £11.25 million. After the General Election I wrote to all our depositors explaining the purpose of the new debenture and generally how the Savings Bank was performing in accordance with the
310 targets we had set ourselves in our manifesto. I also explained in broad terms how the deposits from the public were being reinvested, particularly how the new product launched a few months earlier would play an important role by providing, in some cases, funding for projects undertaken by the private sector but supported by the Ministry for Economic Development as sponsored projects. Mr Clinton did not like my letter to our depositors and chose to comment on it.

315 The level of investment since December, when the letter was distributed, and in particular from January this year, has grown at a huge rate. In my second letter recently I was able to report to our depositors that the level had reached £173 million. The demand continues to grow and depositors are now having to make appointments to be able to purchase debentures. I am, therefore, very confident that at the rate deposits are coming in, particularly for the economic
320 development debentures, this product will probably reach £200 million in the current year.

The level of investment in the economic development debentures will place us in a very good position to support sponsored projects in the current financial year, which will help in the creation of assets and increase our self-sufficiency and resilience; in other words, the role of the people's development bank, the Savings Bank, will be more important than ever before in this present
325 term. As regards the overall target of £2 billion in deposits, which is the figure in our manifesto for the growth of the Savings Bank in this term, it looks at present as if we could reach this target earlier than October 2027.

Madam Speaker, the contrast between the way we responded to the GSD Government on the Savings Bank and the behaviour of the GSD in opposition is like the difference between night and
330 day. In the year 2003, in the Budget, the House was told:

During recent years the availability of appropriate banking services has been concentrated in progressively fewer banks, that is to say the appropriate domestic banking services. Some people particularly the lower paid find it increasingly difficult to obtain range of banking services at affordable prices and on affordable terms. In order to remedy this and to supplement the services available in the private sector the Government will during this financial year

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Be extending the services available and supplement the private sector to remedy this. The Government will during the financial year further extend the role of the Gibraltar Savings Bank by extending the banking services and the banking products provided by the Gibraltar Savings Bank and these will include Cheque Accounts and even Card Accounts are a possibility. Well, Cheque Accounts for certain, ATM facilities, Automatic Tele Facilities and possibly also Card Accounts. This extension of the role of the Gibraltar Savings Bank the Government hopes will go to correcting some of the difficulties that people in Gibraltar, some people in Gibraltar particularly the lower paid, particularly those that are paid low incomes in cash are having in obtaining easy accessible banking services.

I have reminded Members in previous Budgets that there was a later occasion when they announced that the Savings Bank would become a provider of annuities to local workers and that this would convert the Savings Bank into a multimillion-pound business.

335 Madam Speaker, there was not one word of criticism from me, as Leader of the Opposition, nor did I ever chastise them for not delivering on their promises, even though they used 'will' and 'for certain'; I accepted that they found they could not deliver, and that was it. This is in stark contrast to the GSD's conduct when they are in opposition. So, it is not true that the way they react to things that we say we want to do is the way we reacted to the GSD when they said they were promising to do things.

340 In government, their standard position was that they made things public when they thought it should be done, not when we asked questions. Even more important, their policy was that the Opposition had no legitimate right to criticise the Government for delays against delivery times of issues where the Opposition had not made a political commitment themselves and, therefore, by definition, the items in question would have never happened if the Opposition had been
345 successful and become the party in government. A logical argument. By this criteria, 90% of the accusations levelled at the Government by the present Opposition are invalid according to the values and the criteria of when they are in government.

Madam Speaker, looking at the expenditure for the year, the forecast balance of the Consolidated Fund provided a year ago was £176.3 million. This has now been revised and the
350 actual figure is now £179 million. Although there was an improvement in recurrent revenue in 2023-24, at £726.3 million compared to the £727 million in the Treasury estimate, for the current year it continues to be put as an estimate at £733 million, close to the actual outcome for 2022-23, when it was £723.4 million. The position is, therefore, that revenue from existing sources is not increasing and that any new activity under the economic development initiatives could not be
355 expected to have an immediate impact in raising these revenue levels. There will be a time between the creating of the activity and the profits yielding revenue for the Government. Still, it is important to note that the current levels of revenue are higher than any previous year before 2022-23.

The original estimate for 2022-23 was £637 million, following an actual level achieved of
360 £650 million the previous year. This was the start of the recovery of revenue, which had fallen from an all-time high of £703.8 million in 2018-19. This conservative estimate was revised and forecast to come in at £731 million, primarily as a result of forecast tax receipts of £251.4 million as opposed to an original figure of £182.4 million and now further revised to an actual level of £725.5 million. In the case of Company Tax, the forecast was £159.5 million compared to an
365 original estimate of £125.2 million and an actual figure that has now come in at £159.7 million. For the year just ended, 2023-24, the forecast revenue is £746.3 million compared to the original of £726.9 million, £20 million extra. This includes a revised Income Tax forecast of £255.5 million compared to an estimate last year of £250 million and, in the case of Company Tax, a forecast of £155.3 million compared to an original figure of £155 million.

370 On the expenditure side of the Department's budget, the position is as follows. The actual budget figures finished at £603.8 million in 2022-23 from an original estimate of £552.8 million and a forecast of £605.4 million. The utilities head came in at £83.8 million compared to £67.8 million, accounting for £16 million; and Health and Care came in at £203.2 million compared to £192.5 million, accounting for £10.7 million. The total increase in those two heads, therefore,
375 came to £26.7 million and the balance of £9.2 million was spread over the remaining 50-plus heads of department, which went from £307.6 million to £316.8 million, an increase of just under 3%, whilst in the case of Health and Care the increase was 5.6% and the utilities 26.3%, clearly indicating the impact of fuel costs. This £32 million was predominantly in Health and Care, which is forecast to come in at £228 million compared to £203 million, an increase of £25.4 million. The
380 balance of £6.6 million is spread over the remaining 50-plus heads and represents a 1.6% year-to-year increase in respect of all these other Departments collectively, whereas in the case of Health and Care, year-to-year expenditure was up by 12.5%.

It is quite clear that many of our people think that increasing the level of spending by Government every year is normal and that there is an expectation that this will happen. This is only possible when the level of recurrent revenue is also increasing. In the last three years the level of revenue, which recovered after COVID, has been stable but not on an increasing trend. Thus, restraining the growth of public sector expenditure in these circumstances is no mean task, but for as long as our revenue streams remain static there is no other choice.

Looking to the future, Madam Speaker, the way ahead from where we are is not going to be easy. The past year has been quite sensational in terms of our economic performance but it has had negligible impact in increasing government revenues. In the areas of labour productivity and international trade, the performance has probably been the best annual results in the last 52 years. This is in spite of factors such as the wars in Ukraine and elsewhere which are distorting and affecting the global economy, the fact that the globalisation agenda is still growing and the fact that there is an increasing concern that the target of keeping global warming within the range of a maximum of 1.5 degrees over pre-industrial levels looks increasingly unlikely to be delivered. These factors are destroying assets at a huge rate on a global scale, which is impoverishing the global community.

In spite of this negative background, our bilateral trade with the United Kingdom reached the highest level ever in 2023. After starting the increase post-Brexit and then having a downturn with COVID, the terms of trade in the UK have been as follows up to 2023. The bilateral trade – that is the total of our imports from the UK and our exports to the UK – were £2.8 billion in 2016, the Brexit year; in 2017 they rose to £3.7 billion; in 2018, £4.5 billion; in 2019, £4.9 billion. In 2020, we had the COVID effect and it dropped from £4.9 billion to £4.1 billion, but it quickly recovered in 2021 to £6.3 billion, in 2022 to £6.4 billion and in 2023 to £7.2 billion. The value of the UK's exports to us went from £1.8 billion in 2016 to £5 billion in 2023. Our exports to them went from £1 billion in 2016 to £2.3 billion in 2023. We had a £2.7 million trade deficit with the United Kingdom, which means we helped the United Kingdom to the tune of £2.7 billion to stay afloat. To put this in context, we bought more from the UK than either Morocco or Portugal.

At the same time as we reached a £7.2 billion trade bilaterally with UK, we had a similar level with the EU in euros – €7.2 billion, 90% of which was the purchase of fuel. Gibraltar is ranked 43% as a trade partner of the EU, based on the total value of trades in goods, and 26% as the trade partner of the United Kingdom in the trade of services. Taking together these two markets and adding other similar international bilateral flows brings the total figure of our international trade to over £15 billion in a year where our GDP came in at just under £3 billion, giving a ratio of four times international trade to GDP. This is extremely high. The standard view of economists is that a country whose trade is five times their GDP – that is a trade to GDP ratio of 500% – is rare, but that small, highly open economies with substantial trade relative to their economic size might come close to it. One notable example that is quoted is Singapore. In Singapore's case, the trade of exports and imports is often significantly higher than its GDP. For example, in recent years, Singapore's trade to GDP ratio has been reported to exceed 300%, reflecting its status as a major global trading hub. However, reaching or exceeding trade to GDP is uncommon and indicates an exceptionally high level of trade activity relative to a country's economic output. Other small and highly open economies, such as Luxembourg and Hong Kong, also have high trade to GDP ratios, but typically nowhere near as high as 500%. In other words, in this area, in 2023, Gibraltar was number one.

The next success was productivity. Over the past two years, 2021 and 2022, UK productivity has grown at an annual average of 0.9%. This is almost double the average growth in the previous decade, which came to 0.5%. To be clear, low productivity is not unique to the UK. Labour productivity has plummeted in most advanced economies since the late 1990s. It has been especially pronounced since the global financial crisis following the major hit from the COVID-19 pandemic, but the UK performs worse than several comparable economies and it ranks mid table among the G7 countries based on GDP per hour worked, below France, Germany and the United States. The next UK government will need to make tackling low productivity growth its top political

435 and economic priority. This means putting it first in the decisions on public spending, tax policy,
regulation and international economic policy, and doing the minimum necessary on other issues
that compete for resources, despite the strong case for them. There is a simple reason for this.
Without a sustained increase in productivity performance, the UK will continue to find it
440 impossible to meet public expectations for rising prosperity and quality of life, or its international
security, environmental and developmental responsibilities.

In Gibraltar's case, the latest Employment Survey Report, for October 2023, puts the total
workforce at 31,523 and the estimate for 2023-24 GDP at £2,911,120,000, producing a ratio of
output per worker at a value of £92,349. The value of output per worker as a percentage is the
increased productivity that is the new metric introduced in 2019, the base being the October 2018
445 statistic which, for that particular year, was a GDP of £2,455,980,000, which produces growth up
to 2023 of the GDP increase in the years from 2018 to 2023, the five-year period, of
£445.14 million, an 18.53% increase in the value of the output of the economy between the first
year and the last year of the five-year period.

This growth in the output of the economy was accompanied by the growth in the size of the
450 workforce, including frontier workers, of 1,528. The inclusion of frontier workers in the calculation
deals with the biggest shortcoming of the previously used GDP per capita, which is the normal
measure used by everyone else in other economies, but we have one now that takes care of that
anomaly. The workforce increased from 29,995 to 31,523. That means that an increase of 5.1% in
the numbers of workers generated an output, a growth, of 18.53% in the size of the economy,
455 hence reflecting the increased productivity; that is, the increase in the output was more than three
times the increase of the numbers of people employed to generate that output.

The result of the four-year National Economic Plan between 2019 to 2023 is now showing the
results that we projected and proves that we have moved in the right direction. It is important
that we understand that there is no alternative for us, indeed for any other country in the western
460 world, other than increasing efficiency and productivity in order to increase wealth and in order
to be able to provide more and more of the improvements that we want to have for our people.
There is no other way. It is impossible to increase taxation, particularly in an open economy when
we are competing in that area with other people who have similar tax rates.

The new metric applied in 2019 shows that five years after the announcement the increase in
465 productivity has been achieved. The policy of the four years from 2018-19 has been reflected in
the 2023 manifesto and we now have the use of the first-term results as the evidence for what
was going to be government policy going forward. It is, of course, extremely disappointing that
Members of the Opposition have, to date, not given any indication as to whether they agree that
this is the policy that has to be followed or they have a better alternative, or indeed any alternative
470 at all. In my judgement, it is the only policy that safeguards Gibraltar's future. But, of course, that
is self-evident because if I thought there could be something better that we could be doing in
terms of policy then I would have advised the Government to do something else. Indeed, the
policy to optimise and targeting productivity increases is what economies elsewhere are
recommending for the way ahead. In fact, a recent endorsement of the UK future Labour
475 government from a highly regarded economist points to precisely the need for the UK to get out
of the rut of no increased productivity, which is expected to be an early part of the agenda of the
new Labour government.

Madam Speaker, I expect this financial year to see quite a lot of progress in a number of exciting
private sector developments which are sponsored projects using the Economic Plan. The
480 sponsoring of a project does not mean that the project will be funded, constructed or owned by
the Minister for Economic Development or any other Government Department, or that it would
be a charge on our recurrent expenditure, but it does mean that the project will be considered to
result, once completed, in the provision of facilities that will be of benefit for the economic and
social development of our country and/or an asset that contributes to its resilience and adds
485 increased self-sufficiency, thereby contributing to the objectives of the National Economic Plan.

With respect to the point put by the Leader of the Opposition, who does not want to wait a year to be told what I think of his contribution, I will, this year, tell him now. He still does not understand what the expenditure we ask Parliament to approve is conditioned by: (1) what the Treasury conservatively estimates the revenue for the year is likely to be; and (2) the priorities as to what services should be getting in their request for expenditure, constrained by the level of revenue. This is all that is done and has ever been done in putting together a Budget target. If, during the year, less money comes in than was estimated or one Department needs more, since we will not break the golden rule we have to look to make savings or not proceed with spending in other areas to compensate for the excess in the one that is given priority. This is the only way to avoid deficits. This is what the Leader of the Opposition criticises in his speech. Why, Madam Speaker? Because if we take action to avoid deficits, then he cannot attack the deficits that he wants us to have. So he now has to rely on Mr Clinton to criticise the action that we have taken to avoid having deficits, which is what they say they want us to do. Clearly, they are committed to the concept of attacking the Government to such an extent that they attack us if we allow the deficit to take place and they attack us if we take action to prevent it.

Finally, as I have just explained how we have changed the treatment of providing for the loss of government companies, I will deal with the items put by the hon. Member Mr Clinton on social media. Mr Clinton, in anticipation of his contribution, has chosen to place on social media copies of the change of the treatment in company losses as if he was revealing something hidden. The two pages he has copied are already public. I will now provide a similar two pages from the Budgets of 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11, showing the GSD treatment of the company losses, which is the way we have done it, for the first time, this year. By Mr Clinton's calculations, these false surpluses by the GSD Government in the years that I have mentioned were as follows. In 2008-09, the GSD, in the Book, showed a surplus of £18.947 million, but that, of course, was by hiding the deficit in the companies and giving the companies money from the pool of cash. If they had done the exercise done by Mr Clinton with this year's Book, then their surplus for 2008-09 would have been a Clinton deficit of £11.053 million. In 2009-10, the GSD claimed to have produced a surplus of £25,437,000, but calculated in the way that produces the Clinton deficit this year their deficit in 2009-10 was £43,563,000. In 2010-11, they produced a surplus of £28,217,000, but their Clinton deficit was £37.3 million. Clearly, the position is that when we came in 2011-12, we decided that when the year closed we would not do it the way they were doing it from the cash pool; we would do it by giving money out of a surplus, therefore writing off the deficit. That is what made Mr Clinton advise his colleagues to vote against after 2015, when we were giving £30 million to clear deficits in the companies.

For the first time, this year, we have done it the way they used to do it because we have no choice, because we have not got a surplus. So, because we have not had a surplus, we have done what they used to do to avoid showing deficits. (*Interjection*) If it is wrong for us to do it, then we have only done it one year and they did it for three years. On that basis, Mr Clinton has to criticise his own party three times as much as he can criticise us on this particular point.

In 2012, we introduced a contribution of £28.3 million instead of an advance to cover the Government losses and that is why there was a surplus – a true surplus, according to Mr Clinton, instead of an artificial one – of £31,256,000. We have shown that the Clinton surplus is something that has been invented this year and that they never applied it to themselves when they were in government. I think, Madam Speaker, that the facts speak for themselves. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Feetham.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I stand before you today delivering my first Budget speech in this Parliament. I will provide an overview of the activities and initiatives I have been delivering since 12th October 2023 when I was appointed Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry, a portfolio that includes financial services, gaming, justice, postal services and taxation. Given my wide ministerial portfolio and the focus by the Leader of

the Opposition on the Corporate Tax measure announced by the Chief Minister yesterday, I propose to deal with all my Ministries as briefly as possible. This will allow me to respond to the points raised by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and also present the new tax measures we are proposing to announce today.

The last eight months have been a period of review, change and development across all sectors under my responsibility. Broadly, work continues to diversify the financial sectors both geographically and in terms of product offering. It is a priority of our Government to try to dilute the concentration risk, where appropriate. I set out below some of the initiatives implemented in connection with the financial services industry.

I start with financial services. It has been a significant year of change for the team at Gibraltar Finance. Last year we said goodbye to James Tipping, Finance Centre Director, and two of our senior executives, namely Mike Ashton and Tim Haynes. A recruitment process followed for the post of Finance Centre Director and one senior executive. No candidate was successful for the Finance Centre Director position, so the Government has decided to leave the position vacant for the foreseeable future. These changes have had the effect of significantly reducing the cost base of the Department by over £400,000 per annum.

Since taking office, the total revenue received by the Finance Centre under other charges in the financial year 2023-24 has been over £7.44 million. Between the financial years 2011-12 and 2023-24 the total revenue received under the same subhead was just £10 million, of which 74% was collected in the financial year 2023-24. I have also had a look at the spending of the Department. We have implemented spend control measures and decided, for example, to make changes to the Budget by removing 30% of the cost to allow us to focus on the areas that deliver most value to the industry as a whole.

Over the years the Government has provided considerable support to the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission (FSC), including the subvention and contributions to cover extraordinary expenses. This year the FSC was holding significant reserves, which allowed the Government to reduce the subvention to £150,000 from £805,000. This allowed the Government to deploy resources elsewhere, where it was most needed, including a higher budget allocation for training for the Royal Gibraltar Police.

Gibraltar continues to be a premier destination for financial services. Our regulatory frameworks are designed to protect investors whilst fostering innovation. One of our important manifesto commitments is to grow the sector and we want to do it in a safe and secure manner that protects the consumer and guards the macroeconomic future of Gibraltar. We also want to enhance competitiveness and foster employment opportunities, particularly for our youth. The Connect Hub is a strategic initiative designed to empower our youth and bridge the skills gap and increase employment in Gibraltar's financial sectors. We have tried to assist young jobseekers, offering support and guidance to those exploring career opportunities.

The Connect Hub collaborates with leading companies in the financial sectors to provide mentorship, internships and job placements. It also works in partnership with the Digital Skills Academy, hosting workshops and outreach programmes to raise awareness and interest in the financial sectors. These seek to raise awareness, especially among our young people, of the career opportunities in banking, insurance, online gaming and other related industries. I would like to thank Heather Victory, Nicolas Rocca, Karon Cano and the rest of the team for the excellent work they are doing.

My Ministry is committed to fostering strong relationships with our local firms through an outreach programme. I have been delighted to accept invitations from so many firms to visit their premises and meet their people at all levels. Since October 2023, we have proactively engaged with over 20 companies across Gibraltar, reflecting our dedication to understanding and addressing the needs of our financial sectors. The outreach programme has included visits to a diverse range of businesses, encompassing key pillars of our economy, such as banks, accountancy and insurance firms, online gaming companies, investment firms, DLT organisations and more. It has been an absolute pleasure, not just to meet with the senior management teams but also, and

590 more importantly, to meet with their workforce. I have met many wonderful people and this has allowed me to gain insight into the unique challenges and opportunities that these businesses face.

The outreach programme is about taking a proactive ministerial approach, listening to and collaborating with our stakeholders. We are also reviewing and engaging with important industry groups across the sectors, both at home and abroad. Included in this outreach are bodies such as the British Blockchain Association, the All-Party Parliamentary Groups for Cryptoassets and Blockchain, the Association of British Insurers and the Motor Insurance Bureau, to name but a few.

600 Madam Speaker, in the wake of Brexit, Gibraltar finds itself presented with a unique opportunity to forge ahead with the establishment of a captive regime tailored for international business, an endeavour previously hindered within the confines of the EU. The Government is actively engaged in consulting the sector on a captive regime, specifically catering for international entities beyond the UK and EU passported jurisdictions. To drive this initiative forward, a dedicated working group has been formed, comprising industry experts, Government officials and key stakeholders. The group is working on the development and implementation of the captive regime, ensuring it meets the needs of international business while aligning with global best practices.

605 One of the primary objectives of the working group is to design a regulatory framework that is both attractive and secure for captive insurance entities. The aim is to address the specific requirements of international captives, facilitating their establishment and operation in Gibraltar. In addition, this initiative should help the insurance sector diversify from the concentration risk within the Gibraltar Authorisation Regime (GAR), especially with the latest indication being that Gibraltar insurance companies write 37% of the UK motor market. This will not only enhance the jurisdiction's competitiveness to global businesses but also stimulate economic growth, create job opportunities and foster innovation within the local insurance market.

615 The Travel Scheme for Eligible Elderly Resident Citizens was successfully launched on 8th March 2024, providing a vital solution for elderly citizens who face challenges in securing travel insurance. As of now, the scheme has recorded 2,827 registrations, with a majority of these occurring through a face-to-face process organised by the Ministry at the John Mackintosh Hall, which drew 1,811 attendees. This initiative has proven especially beneficial for those hesitant to travel to Andalusia, Spain, due to previous medical conditions, age- or cost-related concerns that made it difficult for them to obtain private medical travel insurance. We said we would deliver a solution and we did within four months of being elected. We have also stopped abuse of the scheme by wealthy members of our community and I may say more about this in the future. In the open insurance market, the indicative cost for an over-60s scheme was estimated to be at least £1.5 million and could have exceeded £10 million annual premium depending on the number of elderly citizens. This would still have come with terms and limits, especially regarding pre-existing medical conditions, which would have excluded many elderly citizens from coverage. Instead, we have implemented a captive-type solution, as I initially explained in Parliament, at a significantly reduced cost – in fact, a very small fraction. This prudent and innovative approach to fulfilling our manifesto commitment has allowed us to reallocate the saved funds to other areas of government expenditure. I would like to express my gratitude to Mr Karon Cano, Senior Project Manager, for the excellent work he has done in assisting me with the implementation of the travel scheme.

635 Madam Speaker, there are a number of other projects at different stages of development. Specific announcements on these initiatives will be made in due course. The Government has a macroeconomic policy interest in encouraging economic growth, whether in financial services or other sectors of the economy. An important aspect of such growth is speed to market, which is often influenced by the legislative and regulatory landscape. Similarly, the Government has a macroeconomic obligation to ensure public funds are used prudently. While businesses will sometimes fail as a result of their commercial activity, the Government's policy is to minimise the

risk of such business failures placing an undue burden on public funds, quite apart from the disruption to local consumers. I am delighted that on 28th May 2024, the Financial Services (Amendment) Act 2024 passed in Parliament with the unanimous support of this House, with the
645 Opposition expressing their full support for the macroeconomic importance of the legislation. I am grateful to the Opposition for this. Separately, I have recently consulted the hon. Member opposite, Mr Clinton, on a piece of insurance-related insolvency legislation I propose to bring to this House intended to safeguard the financial stability of Gibraltar in a particular area, and I am grateful that he has shown an appreciation for the importance, where necessary, of working
650 together in the best interest of Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, may I express my sincere gratitude to the team at the FSC, very ably led by the CEO, Kerry Blight, for their diligent work and support during my time in office. I would particularly like to highlight the contribution made by the young team – Julian Sacarello, Jamie Triay Clarence, Julian Warwick and Daniella Benamor – only because I have worked more
655 closely with them than other colleagues.

As a jurisdiction we continue the detailed and substantial work required for delivery of the GAR, which delivers UK market access for our financial services firms. This requires us to review all our financial services legislation, working closely together with colleagues from the UK government. This is an ongoing programme of drafting and consultation, and I am grateful to the
660 policy team at the FSC for their work in this area. My thanks also to the industry for supporting this work. I know that many people continue to give of their time, working often to tight timetables. My Ministry, together with various Departments and Agencies, also worked very hard to address the deficiencies identified by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and successfully removed Gibraltar from the FATF list of countries under increased monitoring, the so-called grey
665 list. I will come back to this issue later in my speech when I cover the work done under my Justice portfolio.

Before I turn to online gaming, I would like to thank the Finance Centre Council and the various working groups for their time and commitment. I am much obliged. I would also like to thank Mr Jonathan Bracken for the legal drafting work he does for the Government, spanning several
670 years. His knowledge of our financial services legislation is, quite frankly, extraordinary and I am very grateful to him for his excellent work. Finally, I would like to thank Paul Astengo and Emma Azzopardi, senior executives, and the rest of the team at Gibraltar Finance for their support.

I now turn to online gaming. The Gambling Division continues to deliver significant value for money. The Division, which has 10 staff including the Gambling Commissioner, operates on a
675 budget of less than £1 million. In addition to gambling duty, licence fees and change of control fees, since 2020 the Gambling Division has brought in an additional £6.2 million of revenue in regulatory settlements and last year revenue exceeded estimates by over £2 million.

The sector generally provides a significant proportion of the government tax yield, principally through PAYE, Social Insurance and corporate Income Tax. As a ministerial policy initiative, the
680 Gambling Commissioner and the Income Tax Commissioner signed a MoU to have a joined-up approach to optimising tax compliance earlier this year and yield in conjunction with licensing activity.

Gibraltar has a total of 50 licensees. We have seen some market consolidation through M&A activity, acquisition and rationalisation, but Gibraltar remains an important gambling hub for what
685 are now multi-jurisdictional businesses. The main market for our operators is the UK – 72% by using gross gambling yield as a proxy – but we continue to see interest as a base for the rest of the world business. We are still managing interest from operators for licensing in the jurisdiction. Sector employee numbers are 3,711.

There are strong relations with the UK Gambling Commission. In addition, and alongside a
690 policy group advising the Government on the new Gambling Bill, the Gambling Division has supported me from a technical and sector knowledge perspective, as well as maintaining the important relationship with the Gibraltar Betting and Gaming Association and the wider industry.

695 We desire to grow the number of operators in Gibraltar, but that cannot be at the cost of Gibraltar's reputation. As a responsible Minister and Licensing Authority, I am focused on both the integrity of operators and the value they bring to the economy, both in terms of tax yield and the wider macroeconomic contribution.

700 I want to thank the sector for its constructive engagement with me. We are aware that the sector has had to handle recruitment and other operational challenges, but the sector also appreciates the advantages of being located in Gibraltar. I would like to thank Mr Andrew Lyman, Gambling Commissioner, and his team of regulators and administrative staff for the fantastic work they do in overseeing and administering this vital sector of our economy. I would also like to thank Sir Peter Caruana KC, Peter Montegriffo KC, Peter Isola and Albert Isola for the very valuable advice they have provided to me and the Gambling Commissioner on the new Gambling Bill, which I propose to bring to Parliament at the earliest possible date.

705 Madam Speaker, I now turn to Justice. I start with the Government Law Offices and the Office of Criminal Prosecutions and Litigation (OCPL). The Government's team of lawyers have continued to play a crucial part in delivering legal advice to the Government, shaping legislation and providing legal representation to our governmental departments and law enforcement agencies. The team at the OCPL continue to diligently and professionally represent the Crown in our criminal courts at all levels. The successes that they have achieved in the past year have not gone unnoticed, and it is clear that they represent the Crown independently and capably at all times. 710 Aside from their work in the courts, the OCPL continue to work on a number of projects in the ongoing and continuing MONEYVAL process. I would like to thank Christian Rocca KC, Director of Public Prosecutions, and Paul Peralta, Parliamentary Counsel, and their respective teams for their hard work and advice. 715

This year has been a challenging one for the courts on account of the retirement of two members of the judiciary. The Stipendiary Magistrate, Mr Charles Pitto, retired in September 2023, and you, Madam Speaker, retired from the Supreme Court in November 2023. The Judicial Service Commission immediately embarked on the recruitment process for both these two positions, acting on advice from the Commission. His Excellency the Governor appointed Mr Charles Bonfante as Stipendiary Magistrate and HM Coroner, who took up office on 18th March 2024, and Prof. Matthew Happold as Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court. Prof. Happold will take up his post on 1st August this year. As a result of several retirements, and in order to maintain the complement of existing Justices of the Peace, a recruitment process is currently being undertaken by the Judicial Service Commission. 720 725

As Minister for Justice, I will continue to work closely with Hazel Cumbo, the Chief Executive of the Gibraltar Courts Service, to ensure that the courts' back-office administration is properly resourced to ensure that the level of performance, support to the judiciary, court users and the legal profession is maintained, so as to continue delivering a timely and efficient justice system that is open to all. My thanks to Hazel and her team. 730

In respect of His Majesty's Prison, I am delighted to report that there has been no major incident or disturbance reported. The average population figures for the last financial year stood at 31 prisoners. I am happy to say no juvenile admissions were recorded during this period.

735 In respect of rehabilitation, the Prison continues to be well served by professionals offering a variety of programmes to assist offenders in breaking the offending cycle and becoming productive members of the community. Inmates receive counselling and psychiatric evaluation to assist in their journey to rehabilitation. Organisations like Narcotics Anonymous also provide a valuable service. The prison facilities continue to be well used by those in custody.

740 The Government has invested in the training of prison officers who have attended a variety of courses, ranging from a control and restraint instructors' course held in Cyprus, mental health first aid, suicide prevention, first aid at work, and first response emergency care, amongst others. I would like to thank the Prison Superintendent, Nigel Gaetto, and his team for doing a great job. I also want to thank all the members of the Prison Board for their time and the tremendous work they do.

745 This Government is committed to finding an answer to the question of how best Gibraltar as a
whole could tackle the issue of juvenile offenders in our community. Madam Speaker will, both
from her time on the Bench and now as Speaker of this Parliament, note that this is not a new or
novel issue. There has been talk over the past years, in particular, as to whether a solution to this
750 on this issue, after proper consultation with relevant experts, was a manifesto commitment for
this administration and one which I was keen to progress as soon as was practicable. The
information which I received from the experts all pointed to one conclusion: that given the
number of individuals involved and the projected cost, the creation of a secure juvenile detention
755 although there may be arguable benefits in certain circumstances to such a centre, these would
need to be balanced with the reality that the majority of the time the centre would either be
empty or just have one detainee who would, in effect, be in solitary confinement. As such, the
focus must not be solely on what happens once a juvenile is convicted of a crime and sentenced
to imprisonment, but in trying to ensure that there is early intervention. This is why I will be
760 refocusing the work from looking at a juvenile detention centre to working on ways that juvenile
crime may be prevented through timely and early intervention in a manner which makes the best
use of the resources available both outside and inside the Prison. I look forward to working on this
with my ministerial colleagues to ensure the best results for these individuals during the
remainder of this parliamentary term.

765 Madam Speaker, the Probation team is committed to the delivery of services to the courts, the
Prison and the community. In 2023-24, the two social work trained probation officers worked
closely with a range of stakeholders, service users and the wider community and voluntary sector
to assist people with complex needs to lead constructive lives and help make Gibraltar a safer
place. The team has undertaken further training in risk assessment and management techniques
770 and, along with colleagues in the Royal Gibraltar Police (RGP) and Care Agency, plays a pivotal role
in the multi-agency oversight and management of sex offenders in the community. These
arrangements received my direct support when I joined their training event in March 2024.

The team has also benefited from professional supervision by a fellow of the Probation
Institute. During 2023-24, the team has developed links with the Community Justice Overseas
775 Territories Network and this has been an excellent opportunity to gain new skills and knowledge
from other British Overseas Territories, and also to share some of the good practice demonstrated
in Gibraltar. My thanks to Desmond Bell, Jessica Perez and Stuart Santos, who run our Probation
and Community Services.

For several reasons, which I do not need to detail, the past year has been a challenging one for
780 the Royal Gibraltar Police. One of the key issues that they are facing is that of maintaining their
complement. I am pleased to be able to maintain an independent yet positive and professional
relationship with both the Commissioner of Police, who I meet regularly, and the Gibraltar Police
Federation. Of course, as Minister with responsibility for Justice, my powers with respect to the
financing and direction of the RGP are constrained and limited. However, as I have previously
785 confirmed to this Parliament, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has agreed with the
Commissioner of Police that the Royal Gibraltar Police should not fall below the complement level
and that in the new Budget year they will be able to recruit above the complement level to
maintain resilience. The Government has made that commitment clear and it is one that is worth
repeating today. Evidence of this commitment can be seen in the fact that late last year the RGP
790 employed 16 new police officers, who started their recruitment training in September 2023 and
are now operationally deployed. A further 12 police officers started their police recruit training in
January 2024 and will be deployed in August 2024. A further recruitment campaign took place
recently for 18 vacancies, with the successful candidates selected and starting their recruit school
imminently. Additionally, the RGP continues to fulfil its obligations to recruit 10 command and
795 despatch officers and five detention officers as part of the civilianisation of posts to release
officers back into frontline policing. Furthermore, a Crown counsel has been recruited into the

Economic Crime Unit to assist in their work, as well as specialised financial investigators. Again, this is in addition to the RGP's complement of officers.

800 As a result of the recent armed policing inspection carried out by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services, the RGP has strengthened its firearms capabilities and capacity in order to maintain its readiness to meet a wide range of terrorist threats and organised crime. This includes reaccreditation for existing firearms commanders, to maintain 24/7 immediate response command capabilities. A major uplift in firearms officers is under way, with specialised training being delivered locally. The RGP are also future-proofing the force by ensuring
805 that additional officers are qualified as firearms instructors.

Plans are in place to improve New Mole House Police Station, enhancing the working environment and providing much-needed space.

810 Despite the difficulties it faces, the RGP continues to work in all areas of policing. I would like to thank Commissioner Richard Ullger, Assistant Commissioner Cathal Yates, the senior command team and all police officers and support staff. My thanks, too, to the Gibraltar Police Federation for their constructive engagement with me over the last months.

815 Madam Speaker, as the central authority for the receipt, analysis and dissemination of financial intelligence, the Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit, led by its director, Edgar Lopez, continues to make significant progress across a broad range of areas in the global fight against money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing. The unit's digital transformation has continued, exploring options available using artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies that will allow the unit to enhance its operational capacity. Project Nexus, the unit's outreach and engagement programme was awarded the Government of Gibraltar's best project in 2023. Through this initiative, the unit has conducted numerous training sessions in the private
820 and public sectors. Internationally, the unit has become strong and a trusted international partner. My thanks to Edgar Lopez, Carl Ramagge and the rest of the team for the sterling work they do both locally and internationally.

825 The Gibraltar Co-ordinating Centre for Criminal Intelligence and Drugs (GCID) continues to make significant contributions in the sharing of information and intelligence with Gibraltar law enforcement agencies in regard to serious crime, drug trafficking, money laundering and organised crime, which may involve persons or organisations who operate locally or outside Gibraltar's jurisdiction with links to Gibraltar. GCID continues to have seconded officers from the RGP, HM Customs and the Gibraltar Defence Police, with the overall command and responsibility being held with the RGP. My thanks to DS James Rodriguez and the rest of the team for the great
830 work that they do.

835 Following the on-site visit by the FATF to Gibraltar in December 2023, I attended and addressed the FATF plenary in February this year and the FATF removed Gibraltar from the list of countries under increased monitoring, the so-called grey list. Gibraltar had already previously demonstrated that it had made sustainable progress in improving its standards across most of the recommendations made in the Mutual Evaluation Report of MONEYVAL in 2019, with just two points outstanding at that time, namely more enforcement actions by regulators and greater number of confiscations of criminal proceeds. I have said this publicly before, but I would like to thank each stakeholder authority that contributed through their hard work and commitment to this deserved outcome. This has been followed by an announcement last month that Gibraltar has
840 achieved full or largely compliant ratings across all 40 FATF recommendations in the MONEYVAL follow-up process and has exited all further follow-up procedures for MONEYVAL under the current round. Such a high standard of compliance is not frequently seen, even in FATF member countries.

845 However, we cannot rest on our laurels. The political decision of the European Parliament to block the European Commission's delegated regulation to remove Gibraltar from the EU's own list creates an issue. I will work with the Commission on the next steps and I am assured that the Commission remains committed to de-list Gibraltar from the EU list as soon as possible and to engage with us on the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing.

850 Of course, it almost goes without saying that the MONEYVAL Mutual Evaluation Report process
is a continual cycle and Gibraltar has already been informed that the next evaluation will take
place in 2027. I chair a steering committee made up of all Gibraltar stakeholder authorities on a
monthly basis. Through this and other operational interagency working groups, I remain assured
that Gibraltar continues to adhere to the highest international standards in this field, despite
international political obstacles that may be put in our way, such as the decision of the European
855 Parliament.

The MONEYVAL process has extended over seven years. From my professional experience, I
know that there is such a thing as transaction fatigue in any prolonged M&A activity.
Consequently, I understand that continuous efforts in these areas can have a similar effect. I have
been involved for only eight months and I find myself dedicating an inordinate amount of time to
860 it, on top of all my other ministerial responsibilities. My thanks to Kevin Warwick, Richard
Montado and all the organisations and individuals that form part of the various working groups,
for their continuous support in dealing with the FATF and sanctions. Their work helps us all.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to my responsibilities in respect of the Royal Gibraltar Post Office.
Whilst last year saw changes at senior management level in the Post Office, the new management
865 team has continued with a continuous-improvement approach adopted in the Department. As
previously announced by the Government, a new mail centre will be built at Bishop Caruana Road.
The three-storey, purpose-built building will replace the existing temporary facility at the Rooke
site. The new building will include all customer areas on the ground floor, as well as parking and
charging points for the Post Office's electric vehicle fleet. In keeping with the Government's
870 manifesto commitment to a green Gibraltar, the building will also incorporate a green roof. This
significant investment serves to demonstrate this Government's commitment to the
improvement of working conditions to its staff, providing them with the best possible
environment from where to deliver an optimum service to our people. I would like to thank
Peter Linares, Director of Postal Services, and his team at the Post Office for their continued
875 support and good work.

Madam Speaker, finally, I turn to a key portfolio of mine, which is Income and Corporate Tax
under the Tax Office. This portfolio has normally been within the purview of successive Chief
Ministers and I am grateful to the Chief Minister for entrusting me with this responsibility.

I would like to read out a quote from Albert Bushnell Hart, a Harvard-educated American
880 historian often described as the grand old man of American history. This quote aligns to my own
philosophy and beliefs: 'Taxation is the price which civilised communities pay for the opportunity
of remaining civilised.' This emphasises not only the importance of tax revenue but also how
imperative it is to safeguard this revenue from any existential threats. This is the only way we can
ensure economic prosperity and preserve our nation's macroeconomic interests.

885 Tax is vital. Without it, we would be unable to pay for our public services and infrastructure.
That is why I have been vocal and persistent on the subject of increasing tax yield from big
businesses in Gibraltar since taking office. I have since announced in this House a top-up tax for
big businesses and also separately taxed certain of their income that was previously and unfairly
exempt from tax. I presented and therefore subjected both tax measures to scrutiny and debate
890 in Parliament by way of ministerial statements.

We purposely chose not to tax workers, which is what the hon. Members across the floor of
this House would have preferred given their initial reaction to what we were proposing. The
Hon. Chief Minister, in his Budget address yesterday, announced that personal tax rates would
revert to their pre-2022 levels, effectively removing the 2% increase. To maintain the current tax
895 rates would effectively have been an increase in personal taxation for the working population. We
are not prepared to do this.

The Chief Minister also announced an increase in the Corporate Tax rate to 15%. In his own
Budget speech, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition expressed concern that increasing the
Corporate Tax rate to 15% could prompt gaming companies to leave Gibraltar. He stated he was
900 sceptical and suggested that this move could be misguided, potentially causing Gibraltar to lose

its competitive edge. He also asked me to comment on whether there had been consultation with the industry. Even after increasing our Corporate Tax rate from 12.5% to 15%, Gibraltar remains generally highly competitive on a global scale. Many developed countries around the world have higher Corporate Tax rates, with those ranging from 20% to 30%. Specifically, as at 2023, the average Corporate Tax rate in the OECD countries is approximately 23%. A 15% Corporate Tax rate, therefore, strikes the right balance between a competitively low rate, allowing Gibraltar to continue to be attractive as a destination for businesses seeking to legitimately reduce their tax burden, and aligning to international standards and the direction of travel in global taxation and the harmonisation of a minimum global tax rate. Our Government does not expect this increase in Corporate Tax to be a direct driver causing operators in our financial services and gaming sectors to exit our jurisdiction. Many of these benefit from wider macroeconomic interest from Gibraltar, including the absence of VAT. I can confirm to this House that the taxation measures announced in this Budget have indeed been modelled with available statistical information. By moving to a 15% Corporate Tax rate, we are simply aligning ourselves with the OECD minimum Corporate Tax rate. Many of our large gaming operators are already Pillar 2 in-scope companies paying 15% Corporate Tax at a group level, making this increase tax neutral for them.

I must emphasise again, and I will be addressing this specifically later in my Budget speech, that the majority of gaming and financial services companies are not paying any Corporate Tax because they are reporting massive tax losses, while others are only paying a very low amount of Corporate Tax. A small number of companies, as I have previously explained in this House, are paying the majority of the Corporate Tax yield. Thus, the majority of companies will not be immediately impacted by the headline tax rate increase, but that is why we are also implementing the tax measures I will announce today and those we have announced over the past months, on the last occasion with the support of the hon. Members opposite.

We must be careful to avoid contradictions. We cannot say we need to restore financial stability and avoid taxing ordinary people, whilst also refusing to require big businesses to pay their fair share of tax. This would be a financial fiction and it is not possible. Hence, the further tax measures we are now announcing, which have been formulated after consulting with several operators, including some of the largest financial and economic contributors. Our National Tax Strategy must enable the Government to proactively respond to changing economic conditions and unforeseen fiscal needs and help us manage economic stability and growth. This strategy should allow for adjustments to tax measures throughout the year as needed, a practice we have already begun to implement over the last eight months.

We need to ensure our long-term economic success. That is why our efforts must focus on taxation. I will be outlining those initiatives we have undertaken in the last eight months, none of which taxed workers, and others we will introduce shortly, again without taxing workers. Our Government's Tax Strategy aims to optimise revenue through bespoke legislation, greater compliance and more interagency co-operation and collaboration, in particular to ensure that those generating wealth within our community contribute appropriately to tax revenues.

I am delighted to announce that the Income Tax Office now has two highly qualified and widely respected professionals on its team. These individuals bolster an already excellent team and provide the skillset and expertise to enhance the enforcement and compliance function, whilst seeking to reduce aggressive tax planning and optimise revenue. This recruitment allows for internal upskilling through on-the-job training to more junior team members and the development of a professional career in taxation. It opens up opportunities to collaborate with partner tax authorities so that the necessary expertise in complex areas of taxation, such as transfer pricing, may be developed. This pivotal step in our Tax Strategy proves our commitment to serving the public interest, safeguarding our macroeconomic interests and driving the right changes in taxpayer behaviour through policy development and compliance activities. I look forward to the positive impact they will undoubtedly make.

Madam Speaker, you may recall a Tax Bill that I brought to this Parliament in February 2024. This Bill extended the remit of paragraph 15 of schedule 3 to the Income Tax Act and provided

certainty and clarity on the taxation of those sources of income generated by new technologies. This innovative approach of identifying gaps in our legislation underpins the very core of our tax policy. We can then focus our efforts on these specific areas for the benefit of our community.

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A key principle of our Tax Strategy is to ensure that any new legislation tackles issues that we perceive may pose a risk to our economic sustainability. Our solutions seek to ensure that large taxpayers pay their fair share of taxation towards our community for our shared benefit. This allows us to continue to support expenditure in our public sector, Health Service and education. This is a matter of macroeconomic importance for Gibraltar. In this regard, I echo the words of Arthur Vanderbilt, a well-known American judge and judicial reformer, who said, 'Taxes are the lifeblood of Government and no taxpayer should be permitted to escape the payment of his just share of the burden of contributing thereto.' This concept of fiscal responsibility is at the heart of these new tax measures we are introducing. Our intention is to drive economic prosperity through increased tax revenue, whilst also ensuring that we eliminate the possibility of exploiting tax advantages.

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In April 2024, I revealed to both Parliament and the public that the financial sectors in Gibraltar had accumulated significant tax losses in excess of £2.1 billion. Closer study of our taxpayer demographic revealed two important observations. These are: (1) a clear example of the 80:20 rule, where a small number of licensed and regulated financial sector businesses contribute the majority of the Government's Corporate Tax revenue; and (2) the existence of some large multinationals in these financial sectors reporting small and even nil profits locally in comparison to significant profitability at group level. This is unacceptable and threatens the foundation of our fiscal sustainability. This issue not only jeopardises the Government's recurring revenue but also risks the viability of future cashflows. Gibraltar cannot, and will not, carry the reputational risk of licensed and regulated companies without economic benefit for our community. Left unaddressed, it poses a clear and present risk to Gibraltar's macroeconomic interest.

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For this reason, the first Corporate Tax measure I will be speaking about aims to preserve tax revenue in the light of such significant accumulated tax losses. This measure will limit the use of the losses available for carry forward, preventing the erosion of taxable profits by businesses with significant tax losses and delaying the payment of tax for years to come. An overriding principle of this measure will be the continued ability to carry forward unutilised losses within the context of the regime. Similarly, the regime should permit current year losses to be deducted and it is not intended to tax loss-making businesses. The regime will not increase the tax burden. What we intend to change is when tax is paid and eliminate the complete erosion of taxable profits using carried-forward accumulated losses – as previously stated, in excess of £2.1 billion. This is not about the amount of tax; it is about the timing of tax and limiting the ability to push tax off into the far distance.

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We have studied Gibraltar's taxpayer base and economy carefully, focusing on those industry sectors with the highest usage of carried-forward tax losses. Our taxpayer study revealed that, as expected, our financial sectors are the most active industries. In 2008, the United Kingdom limited the carried-forward loss regime for the banking sector. Other jurisdictions do likewise. We have, therefore, taken a policy decision with the regime we will be introducing to limit it to those sectors comprising the bulk of the carried forward losses, namely the financial services and gaming sectors. The regime does not remove the benefit obtained from those deductions, allowances or equivalent provisions introduced between 1st July 2020 and 31st July 2022. These very generous measures designed to stimulate the economy will remain. This regime does not eliminate losses. They can continue to utilise accumulated losses prospectively, albeit at a slower rate; one which allows and ensures a fair and proportionate economic contribution to our shared community.

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Our studies have identified the economic risks for Gibraltar if this position remains unaddressed. In our view, this is the legitimate aim and justification underpinning the initial implementation of this measure. This is just one element of our National Tax Strategy and will only reach its maximum potential once all gaming and financial services operators are reporting profits. We are not there yet. Our work through tax compliance inquiries and interventions must

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1005 work concurrently with this measure. This is the only way in which we can address this critical
issue. This measure will be effective from 1st July 2024 and be immediately effective for returns
filed after this date, irrespective of the actual accounting period being filed. This is necessary given
some of the delayed filing positions observed in these sectors.

1010 I now turn to the other measure that will be introduced. This one seeks to impose taxation on
the profit or gains derived from property sales, where any person holds three or more properties.
With the saturation of the property market in Gibraltar, the acquisition of property portfolios,
including off-plan developments, and the subsequent sale of these real estate assets is generating
wealth. The purpose of this measure is to provide clarity and certainty regarding the taxation of
1015 this activity. Too often, what is happening is people are trading in property but believing that this
activity is outside the scope of our tax regime. It is trading income and we set out to clarify the
law to allow such behaviour to be taxed without costly enforcement action. This is why we will set
the threshold for tax at the ownership of three or more properties other than a primary residence
or other exempted property. We do not seek to tax those who have a small number of properties,
1020 but instead those who effectively have a property trade and are generating substantial wealth
from this. After long consideration, the threshold of three or more properties was felt to properly
make that distinction.

The GSLP Liberal Government has built more affordable homes than any previous
administration. However, families buying a home are also competing against wealthy speculators,
which drives up property prices. We are taking action against investors who treat our property
1025 market like a stock market, and we will not hesitate to introduce further measures, if necessary.
We intend to introduce an anti-avoidance feature in this measure, under which any person
undertaking professional conveyancing activities on behalf of another holds a reporting obligation
to notify the Income Tax Office. This will be broadly modelled on the existing legislation regarding
the requirement imposed on professional advisers to disclose reportable cross-border
1030 arrangements. Given the composition of the property market in Gibraltar, we will ensure that
suitable exemptions are included to ensure the measure is focused and does not impose
inadvertent or improper taxation.

1035 With the inclusion of off-plan properties we believe it is right to bring this part of the property
sector in Gibraltar within taxation. We expect this to generate positive revenue flows. This is, once
again, a proportionate approach, one designed to tax the wealthy that are investing their funds
by effectively trading in our real estate stock and then capitalising on the resulting profits and
gains, benefiting from the absence, historically, of tax clarity on such transactions. This measure
will apply with effect from 1st July 2024.

1040 These are the new tax measures that are to be introduced. I am pleased to announce that the
relevant draft Bills are in the final stages of preparation and will be available shortly to be laid in
Parliament for their First Reading. My intention is also to provide explanatory notes to the
business community at large so that these measures can be fully understood.

1045 In addition to these measures, our Government also intends to modernise aspects of the
current tax law. This is the very essence of tax law evolution. It is necessary to adopt a dynamic
approach to taxation and for our law machinery to be flexible to cater for both business and
jurisdictional needs.

1050 Firstly, I will turn to the living accommodation exemption under schedule 7 to the Income Tax
Act 2010 for employees relocating to Gibraltar under predefined parameters. We have received
representations that the current provisions are out of date and are not an effective tool for local
employers to use in competing globally to attract skilled employees to Gibraltar. Attracting the
right people to Gibraltar is paramount to our success. We need the right people in the right jobs
and our Government is committed to facilitating this. We have listened to the industry's concerns
and we will be proposing changes, modernising this in line with our policy objective and wider
requirements. Our proposal will seek to afford more flexibility by allowing the benefit to continue
1055 to apply even when the employee changes address or employment after having relocated to
Gibraltar. This exemption is intended to assist employees in relocating to Gibraltar to take up

1060 employment, primarily in the accounting sector. Consequently, this benefit will apply to
accommodation in Gibraltar, obviously, not in Spain. Similarly, we will also review the duration of
the exemption. Presently, this spans a seven-year period. This is too long for a relocation, so we
will be reviewing this and aligning to a more reasonable period of time to reflect the intent of the
1065 exemption. We understand that the average duration of stay of such employees within particular
business sectors does typically not extend beyond three to four years following their arrival in
Gibraltar. As with any regime change, we must endeavour to avoid inadvertent consequences. For
this reason, transitional rules will need to be introduced to ensure a fair treatment for those
1070 individuals that are currently enjoying the benefit. Whilst ensuring fair taxation is paramount, it is
also necessary to ensure anti-abuse safeguards exist and compliance with the relevant filing
obligations. These are being considered.

The other legislative amendment proposed seeks to maintain the tax status enjoyed by those
students undertaking employment, whilst avoiding inequity for standard employees. Since
1075 1st July 2015, those full-time students in part-time employment have been dealt with under a
special tax for both PAYE tax and Social Insurance purposes. This exempted the income earned by
the students outside the vacation period. In other words, a full-time student earning income
outside the vacation periods from their part-time employment did not pay tax. We are not
proposing to tax students. Unfortunately, this generous measure designed to sustain and support
1080 our youth as the caretaker generation for our future has been abused. Owner-managed
businesses are circumventing the obligation to pay PAYE tax and Social Insurance by inflating
student family members' salaries, which are then returned to the same household. This is
absolutely disgraceful. Disgraceful, but true. For this reason, we will be tightening the conditions
for this exemption. We need to stamp out this abuse and prevent others seeking to exploit
1085 meaningful measures for their own selfish benefit. We will therefore seek to apply the income
threshold of £11,450 to both tax and Social Insurance in relation to the income earned by
students. This harmonises the position and ensures equal taxation based on income and not the
status of the individual concerned. It will prevent individuals in full-time jobs, working hard to
support their families and coping with the burden of taxation, being placed in an inequitable
1090 position when considering some students enjoying tax-free earnings at the same level, often
inflated artificially for tax avoidance purposes. As with the new measures announced, these
legislative amendments are in their final stages. I will bring them to this Parliament to be read
shortly and once ready.

All hon. Members will recall the important announcement I made in this House in
1095 December 2023 regarding the introduction of a qualifying domestic top-up tax as part of our
Pillar 2 implementation plan. The team at the Income Tax Office has engaged with the working
group set up by the Government for this initiative and are presently considering the best way in
which to introduce this significant and historic tax measure. Similarly, we are continually engaging
with the technical team at the OECD Secretariat to ensure that our initial implementation of our
1100 Pillar 2 plan is fully compliant and aligned to the requirements of the envisaged peer review
process. The implementation of Pillar 2 is complex and resource intensive, and all efforts are
currently focused on introducing the top-up tax by the end of 2024. We expect draft legislation
for September, at which point a wider consultation will be undertaken with all relevant
stakeholders. Our work on Pillar 2 will continue with the implementation of the income inclusion
rule during 2025.

While I could share more on tax policy and the work of the Tax Office, much of it is already
public. To save time, further information can be made available online as necessary. My sincere
thanks to John Lester, the Commissioner of Income Tax, Julian Baldachino and the team at the Tax
Office for the excellent work that they do.

1105 In conclusion, over the last eight months, I have restructured my Department, taken costs out,
and have introduced prudent tax measures, with more announced today. This is in addition to the
policy initiatives we have delivered. I remind this House that I have previously stated, and
repeated here today, that we will, if necessary, introduce tax measures outside the annual

1110 budgetary cycle. Most countries around the world face the same dilemma – whether to borrow
more money or find new and sustainable sources of tax revenue to match levels of public
expenditure. If we do not manage expenditure and we do not introduce targeted tax measures,
the cost of inaction will only increase in the future, yet the Opposition’s reaction to the increase
in the Corporate Tax rate, still one of the lowest in Europe, was to suggest that it was misguided,
aiming – they, that is – to protect big business, without regard to the underlying statistical
1115 information. No doubt they will say the same today about our proposal (1) to ensure that big
businesses do not use accumulated tax losses to continue to avoid their tax responsibilities; and
(2) to tax wealthy property speculators.

This reminds me of the words of Clement Attlee during the 1945 general election, which Labour
won by a landslide. Referring to the Conservative Party led by the great wartime Prime Minister
1120 Sir Winston Churchill, who went on to lose that election, Attlee said, ‘The Conservative Party is a
party that stands for private enterprise, private profit, and private interests.’ Not us, Madam
Speaker. We are raising taxes today from those who can afford and should pay. But across the
floor of this House, when it comes to taxation they can be expected to prioritise the interests of
the wealthy and the powerful over the needs of this community. Make no mistake, their political
1125 instinct is not to look after the working class. I therefore make no apology for the tax measures
we are announcing in this House today and others that might follow in the future.

Finally, I must thank the team at my office, led by Julian Baldachino, Principal Secretary, for
looking after me and for their untiring work in supporting me as we strive to deliver our policy
objectives. They all work in different areas, but each is critical to our progress. My sincere thanks
1130 to each of them and my sincere thanks, too, to the Chief Minister for his support and
encouragement.

I now appreciate what my friend Albert Isola meant during the election campaign when he
said, ‘It is very difficult, if not impossible, to walk into these ministerial portfolios without the
professional experience of knowledge built over many years.’ I did this because, as I said during
1135 the election, I wanted to help Gibraltar in what I knew were going to be very difficult times ahead.

Yesterday, when I listened to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, who I admit I like as a person,
I kept asking myself, ‘What would his party do in Government to manage expenditure, including
public sector costs, and in order to raise the necessary cost to pay for it?’ We must be able to
engage constructively as parliamentarians in this important debate, especially given the size of
1140 our country. *(Banging on desks)*

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I am conscious that you have been in the
chair now since four o’clock; it is almost half past six. I wonder whether this might be a convenient
moment to recess until ten to seven.

1145 **Madam Speaker:** We will take a recess until ten to seven.

The House recessed at 6.25 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 6.50 p.m.

**Appropriation Bill 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate continued**

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Clinton.

1150 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. This year’s Estimates of Revenue and
Expenditure for 2024-25 have been prepared in a manner which I can only describe as calculated
to mislead and deceive the reader. It has already been labelled by some witty observers, much
wittier than myself, as a ‘car crash Budget’ given the record U-turn on the proposed 10-year-old

1155 vehicle pollution levy, a tax which was unfair, if not ill-thought, and would have disproportionately affected those worst-off in our community and not wealthy Porsche drivers such as our pseudo-socialist Chief Minister. This flies in the face of what the Hon. Minister for Taxation is suggesting, that this side, somehow, is the party that would tax individuals, whereas the evidence, as we saw yesterday, is completely to the contrary.

1160 It is unprecedented that a Budget debate in this House has generated such a spontaneous reaction from the public, resulting in a demonstration outside No. 6 yesterday evening. It goes to show that the Budget session is a very serious matter that matters to people and affects people in very real ways. We can see the evidence of this not just in Gibraltar but in other countries: in Kenya, they have had riots on the Finance Bill. Taxation goes to the core, the very heart of what parliamentary democracy is about. The Minister for Taxation loves to quote eminent historians. Of course, he is well familiar with the American revolutionary cry of 'No taxation without representation'. That is what we are here in this place to do as representatives of the people: to tax them as necessary and only as necessary to meet spending for the needs of the community. We have to do that responsibly.

1165 The Chief Minister yesterday came dangerously close to what I can only describe as his Liz Truss moment. I will comment on his ill-conceived Budget measures later, but first I have to pass judgement on his Budget as a whole.

1170 The Budget presentation has changed, so the Government can pretend the Consolidated Fund has produced a small surplus in 2023-24 and projects the same for 2024-25. This is so evidently a disingenuous and inconsistent presentation of the numbers that I would vote against the Budget just on that point, let alone our historic concerns that remain as to how they book stuff off balance sheet. The truth is that the outturn for this last year ending 2024 should, using their own numbers, reflect a deficit of £25.7 million, and indeed next year a further deficit of £26.7 million, not the small surpluses the Government suggest; nor is this any sign of a return to financial stability. I will show that the 2023-24 true deficit is, in fact, more like £44.7 million after adjusting for some flattering accounting.

1180 Madam Speaker, I truly regret that this debate will, if the Government maintain their pretence as to the authenticity of their numbers, descend into a parody of the famous Monty Python *Dead Parrot* sketch, whereby the general public and the Opposition can see the self-evident truth that this Budget is dead – a dud; it is not functioning – and the Government will maintain, 'No, it is alive and well,' when it evidently is not. I propose to, first, explain why this is a cynical representation of the numbers; second, analyse the financial position; and then finally, in a departure from my previous Budget contributions, offer the Government some constructive advice as to how to begin to correct the dangerous tailspin – and it is a tailspin – we face in our public finances as the deficits continue to mount.

1185 The Government has this year, rather bizarrely, reverted to a presentation and method of funding government companies that they themselves changed and have consistently stated since 2012 was wrong and flattered the results. In fact, Sir Joe Bossano has just admitted that, in his contribution to this House. He admits that when they came into government they changed it. They can remind themselves of this and their contributions by reading *Hansard* of 9th July 2012, 8th July 2016, 5th July 2018 and 19th December 2019. On each of those occasions, they all described what they are proposing in the Book as is presented to the House today as wrong.

1190 In last year's Estimates Book, in arriving at an estimated surplus for 2023-24 of £2.5 million, the Government included within recurrent expenditure an amount of £30 million, being the contribution to government-owned companies which is identical to that contributed over the prior four years. This was nothing new, but yet in the forecast outturn in the Budget Book that we have before us, the number is reported as zero. Then we have a forecast surplus of £1.9 million. Zero and then a surplus of £1.9 million. The financial support to government-owned companies is now instead reported as an 'advance' further down the page and is excluded from the surplus calculation. If the Government had maintained the same presentation which they have insisted on since 2011 and as anticipated last year, the £27.6 million would have reduced the forecast

1205 surplus of £1.9 million to a forecast deficit of £25.7 million – £25.7 million initial deficit, using their numbers.

For the benefit of the general public, I have placed both last year’s estimate for 2023-24 with this year’s outturn for 2023-24 on my Facebook page this morning, so they can see for themselves what the Government has done to change the presentation of the numbers. Sir Joe has seen that
 1210 Facebook post and commented on it, and he does not deny it. He effectively has admitted to this House that they changed the presentation ‘because there is no surplus’ – Sir Joe’s words. If the public do not have access to my Facebook page, they can look up Government Press Release 406/2023, which was published on 11th July 2023, for the full Budget Book last year and then look at page 1 of last year’s Book and they will see £30 million there, and then compare it to
 1215 page 2 this year and it is zero. Similarly, a provision for a £30 million company contribution next year in this year’s Budget Book is just shown as a notional £1,000. If they adopted the same concept that they certainly have done for the last four years at least and provided £30 million, that would reduce this estimated small surplus of £3.3 million to a deficit of £26.7 million in 2024-25.

1220 So where is this return to financial stability that the Chief Minister boasts about? It is not there; it is a mirage. This is just accounting sleight of hand. It does not take a genius to see what the Government has done. They admit it; Sir Joe has said it. When we asked him, ‘Why have you done this?’ he said, ‘Well, we do not have a surplus.’ So, remarkably, the Government, it would appear, will now go to any length, including – and this is really quite remarkable – ignoring their own
 1225 convictions, to disguise the fact that its recurrent expenditure was significantly underestimated last year, as we warned, and, in addition, evidently dangerously out of control, as witnessed by the admitted overspending.

Sir Joe, in his analysis of this presentation, which he seems to think is acceptable because he now calls it ‘the Clinton deficit’ ... I have never been named after a deficit; I would much rather
 1230 have a star named after me, but so be it, the Clinton deficit. The Clinton deficit is nothing more than the truth. They have been following a presentation for the last 11 years, they change it and now, suddenly, it is the Clinton deficit. I am sorry, Madam Speaker, that just does not wash.

For the sake of making the Estimates Book, as it will be published, easier to follow for the general public, I would ask that the Financial Secretary include a subtotal on page 2 under the line
 1235 that says ‘Repayments of public debt’ to arise at the balance of the Consolidated Fund. This would reflect the format that was adopted in 2011 that Sir Joe has already referred to. This would avoid the confusion as to why the closing balance on page 2 is different to the opening balance on page 1. I think that would be an easy adjustment to make before the Estimates Book is published.

Madam Speaker, that is really fundamental and goes to the heart of the matter. The Chief
 1240 Minister stood up and said, ‘Well, I predicted a £2.5 million surplus but, guess what, I came in at £1.9 million – aren’t I brilliant?’ Actually, he is not brilliant. He has failed completely – not even marginally, completely – to the extent he has had to get egg on his face and say, ‘Well, look, you know what we said in 2011? We are going to ignore that. We are going to go back to the way the GSD did it, because that is more convenient for us now.’

1245 So where are his principles? Where is his conviction? Where is the transparency and the reality? We did not hear a word from him during his Budget address. It fell to Sir Joe to explain it, and only because I put it on my Facebook page. Were they hoping that no one would notice? Were they hoping that we would not notice? What were they thinking? They are not reporting surpluses, they are reporting deficits, not just for this year but for next year. It is about time we understood
 1250 in this place that we are talking about people’s money. They are genuinely concerned, and if he does not believe it, he only had to look out of his window yesterday evening and he would have seen it for himself. The people are concerned.

When we look at the actual Book itself and we look at the estimated departmental outturn, it shows a massive £65.1 million overspend, and the Chief Minister would have us believe he has
 1255 produced a surplus of £1.9 million. Nonsense, Madam Speaker. Ignoring the distorting effects the manner, as I have just described, of funding government companies has had on the reported

results, the fact is that the total recurrent departmental expenditure budgeted for 2023-24 was £570.7 million and the estimated outturn is £635.5 million; as I said, an incredible net £65.1 million overspend. That compares to a departmental overspend of £53 million in 2022-23, so the overspending is getting worse.

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Again, the overspend is, in the main, £57 million in respect of the GHA, Elderly Residential and the Care Agency. We warned last year, before the election, that the GHA budget was unrealistic and short by at least £20 million given historic spending patterns. It does not take a genius to take the last few years, average it and say, 'What do we think it is going to come out at?' The GHA alone exceeded its budget by double that amount, at £43.7 million. The total cost in 2023-24, the year just gone, of these three services, which will now be combined, amounted to £228.6 million, and the Government intends to budget, by some miracle, £207.7 million in 2024-25, some £21 million less, which again may prove unrealistic given that healthcare costs are only likely to keep on rising. As the Leader of the Opposition pointed out in his address, the Estimates for 2024-25 are just as unrealistic as we pointed out last year, and this is even without the favourable treatment accorded the contribution to government companies.

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There are other areas which are perhaps conspicuous by their absence. I did not hear Sir Joe talk about Community Care. Last year, I think he said the reserves for Community Care were something like £39 million. We have not heard a word from Sir Joe about the reserves for Community Care, but then perhaps it is because when you look at the Social Assistance Fund on page 239 of the Estimates Book, the Government has not made the envisaged £7.5 million contribution to Community Care. It is nil, nothing, zero. So, what is the position in relation to Community Care, one of Sir Joe's favourite rainy day funds? Is it that it is actually coming to a crunch position? Community Care spends about £20 million a year. Last year it had perhaps £39 million, according to Sir Joe, so this year it may have £19 million left. Is that perhaps why the Chairman of Community Care wanted to resign? Is it because he could see that Community Care has a problem? If Community Care has a problem, we have a problem, because Community Care gets its funding from the Consolidated Fund, indirectly. So, if the Government is projecting – as we say, assuming their numbers – even a surplus of £3 million, they are going to have to contribute some money into Community Care to keep it afloat, unless there is something that we do not know about, and perhaps the Chief Minister will enlighten us.

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Madam Speaker, talking about things that are not there, we are unable to locate in the 2024-25 Estimates any provision for the £10 million Care Agency settlement. We were advised, in answer to Question 393/2024, that this was processed by Treasury on 8th May 2024. It does not even appear as an exceptional expense in the Consolidated Fund for 2024-25. The Minister for Health gave an undertaking to this House to provide information as to where the money had come from if the Leader of the Opposition wrote to her, which indeed he did. On 21st May 2024, the Leader of the Opposition wrote to the Minister as follows:

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As mentioned in Parliament, grateful if you could confirm whether the £10 million was paid from the Consolidated Fund or from any other fund or any other entity/Government entity or source and, if so, which specific source.

This goes to the heart of the Budget Book and the Appropriation Bill which was before the House for the forthcoming year. We have not, as at this date today, had a reply from the Minister, and we need to know. If the Treasury has actually paid £10 million without the cover of an appropriation, then I worry for whoever the controlling officer is as to whether they may be held responsible for an unauthorised payment. At the end of the day, what we are doing in this House, although we dress it up as a State of the Nation address, is really about the Appropriation Bill. It is a law which authorises the Government to spend a certain amount of money, and if they exceed that spend or that vote they are meant to come back to the House with supplementaries. It is meant to be a control of expenditure. And so, we really need to know how this £10 million has been spent. Sir Joe calls the Estimates 'non-binding', but it is an Appropriation Bill, it is a proposed law: it is meant to be binding. It is meant to control expenditure. That is what we do here in the

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1305 Parliament. It is not just a guesstimate and whatever comes in we will change it and ask for some
more money. It is meant to be a control on spending and it is meant to be a Budget that is realistic.
Otherwise, why don't we just do away with the niceties and put £1,000 notional in the Book all
1310 the way through, and then they can spend whatever they want and then come back with a
supplementary? It would be the same thing. The Minister for Health's Department is the biggest
spender and I and my colleagues shadowing Health and Care look forward to hearing what she
thinks of the Budget estimates for her Department and her combined Department, and how she
intends to meet such ambitious targets. As the Minister follows me in this debate, probably
tomorrow, I would be grateful if she would give the House the information requested as to the
source of the £10 million, as she undertook she would.

1315 The Government's spending budget across the board continues to be unrealistic and it is
evidently unable to control costs. Sir Joe Bossano used to be the Minister for Financial Stability.
Now that office – it has not been abolished, by the way, it is still there – is the Chief Minister's
responsibility. I noticed with some concern that Sir Joe did not say a word about sustainability and
financial stability and spending, which he has done in the past and warned the House that
1320 spending was unsustainable. He did not say a word.

If we look at the charges for 2024, the outturn shows a £12 million saving. The total recurrent
Consolidated Fund charges budgeted for 2023-24 was £120.6 million. The estimated outturn is
£108.6 million, delivering a net saving of some £12 million. Bravo, you might say, but the bulk of
this saving is in the area of public debt charges, which is actually quite unusual when you think
1325 about it because direct gross debt, public debt, has remained static since last year and the interest
cost has remained stable. The answer is that £10 million of interest cost has been charged to the
General Sinking Fund and not the Consolidated Fund as originally anticipated. This has obviously
flattered the year's result. So, we should adjust the recurrent deficit from what I said previously
of £25.7 million to, in fact, £35.7 million. The proof of this is simply that next year's interest cost
1330 for 2024-25 is £10 million higher with no increase in direct gross borrowing or interest rates. As
to why this was done through the Sinking Fund, Sir Joe Bossano last week responded quite
honestly to supplementaries to Question 533/2024, explaining that this was done due to 'the
financial situation this year'. Add that to what he said before – there is no surplus. So, the
Government is obviously scrambling, trying to find pockets of money to disguise the fact that they
1335 are in a hopeless position. Raiding the Sinking Fund in this way also has the effect of increasing
reported aggregate debt from £844.44 million to £854.4 million, so although he has not actually
borrowed more, the net effect has been to increase aggregate debt because they raided the
Sinking Fund.

1340 On the revenue estimates – and the Chief Minister may find this of interest – the Chief Minister
in his address, on line 216, stated the following:

Third-party revenue came in at £746 million, which is £13 million more than our projected revenue of £733 million.

That is on line 216 of his speech. I, however, need to correct this statement, in that it should read,
'which is £22 million more than our projected revenue of £724 million'. The Chief Minister, it
would appear, has read off the revenue line for the actual result for 2022-23 or perhaps suffered
a typo for the forecast for 2023/24. Either way, I am sure he would wish to correct the record,
1345 especially as it is in his favour and giving him a £22 million benefit as opposed to what he said was
£13 million. Madam Speaker, it is important that Budget numbers are reported accurately.

Sir Joe mentions that revenue is stable but not increasing. He talks about the need to restrain
spending and he says, in cryptic words, there is no other choice, but he does not elaborate. He
has not indicated whether he thinks his Budget is even sustainable. The Minister for Tax is very
1350 quick to point out that we need tax to support spending. Of course, but what level of spending?
How is spending going to be controlled? Who is going to be doing the controlling?

The net Consolidated Fund overspend of £53.1 million, which I calculate as the £65.1 million
I just mentioned less the £12 million I just mentioned, was therefore offset by improved revenue

1355 receipts of £22.5 million, reducing the impact of the deficit to a net £30.6 million additional loss. This is further reduced by £2.5 million in respect of company contributions, which would then give you a net-net loss of £28.2 million to be deducted from the original estimated surplus of £2.5 million for 2023-24. This, then, brings us back to what I originally reported of the unadjusted deficit of £25.7 million.

1360 The excess revenue reported this year is significantly lower than last year, which was £94 million; £22 million versus £94 million. Indeed, the revenue for the main heads – being Corporate Tax, Income Tax and Import Duty – in 2023-24 have come in more or less as budgeted and not greatly exceeded, as in prior years. What is not entirely clear from the Estimates Book is why other receipts – under head 2, subhead 7 – came in at £7.4 million. This is something like £7 million more than is usual compared to prior years. I have gone back a few years and there has never been anything of this kind of magnitude on that line. I would be grateful if the Chief Minister could, in his reply, explain what has gone into that line in the year just gone.

1365 Included in the £22.5 million excess revenue, however, is some £9 million taken in by way of state aid tax receipt, which in my view cannot be deemed to be normal recurrent revenue, so this needs to be excluded from calculating the recurrent deficit, which if added back then increases from £35.7 million after adding back interest of £10 million, to £44.7 million, which is what I have already called the true deficit number. Given this true deficit number and the likelihood of a further deficit next year, we really have to examine our ability to repay our existing direct debt going ahead.

1370 This last year the Government has not borrowed any more money by way of direct debt, and the current borrowing under the UK guaranteed facility of £500 million remains at £425 million. Of course, we are now a year closer to the rollover repayment date of December 2026, but we still do not have a credible repayment plan. The Government has stated its intention to commence repayments. Last year's Estimates included a provision for half a million repayment but it did not happen, and next year the Government is projecting a £1 million repayment, but as I said last year, we do not have a credible plan to repay this debt. We would need at least £19 million a year over 22 years to repay the £425 million. Ten per cent of surpluses is not going to cut it, especially when we are in deficit. This is a serious point. The Government should be negotiating with the UK Treasury for a long, long-term plan, with all the options on the table as to period for repayment.

1380 Whereas the Government has not borrowed more direct debt, although it has raided £10 million from the Sinking Fund, it has certainly increased indirect debt by borrowing more from the Gibraltar Savings Bank. Every year I analyse the gross borrowing on the direct basis and the indirect borrowing on a gross basis, but these are, I have to caveat, my best guesstimate because, of course, the Government does not like to give me these numbers. On the gross debt, the Government issued £372.7 million, which in fact is owned by the Gibraltar Savings Bank. There is the £5 million a year, probably expiring soon, facility of £75 million and the £425 million facility, which we know is the UK guaranteed facility. So, what we have in terms of direct debt is £500 million of bank borrowing and £372.7 million in government debentures held by the Savings Bank. That means the total gross direct debt is £872.7 million. As I mentioned last year, £625 million of that direct debt, 72% of it, is on a floating rate that will vary with the Bank of England base rate. Whereas it is anticipated rates will be cut, it is unlikely we are going to return to the period of ultra-low base rates, and so compared to previous years, unfortunately the burden of servicing our public direct debt is going to be a lot higher than it used to be.

1395 Each year I try to quantify the indirect gross debt, being the moneys borrowed through companies, and this year I have the following list: the mortgage of the housing estates, which we know of, £300 million; Credit Finance borrowing from the Savings Bank, £438 million; the so-called sale of 50:50 Affordable Housing Scheme, £165 million; GSBA borrowing from the Savings Bank, £100 million; Gibraltar Properties Ltd borrowing from the Savings Bank, £80 million, which the Chief Minister was happy to disclose to this House without breaching the corporate veil of the company; ES Ltd, the power station, £92 million; Gibraltar Car Parks Ltd, £48 million; the purchase of the Hospital through GCP Investments, £16.9 million, which was disclosed last year; some

sundry amounts from GCP Investments, £8.3 million; and of course, the mysterious GEP Ltd, £17 million, which seems to have a special status compared to Gibraltar Properties Ltd. That adds up, the indirect gross debt, to £1.3182 billion. In just the period January to March 2024 – that three-month period just before the financial year ends – the Government borrowed a further
1410 £20 million via Credit Finance from the Savings Bank. Over the last year, £60 million was borrowed by GSBA Ltd to fund Sir Joe’s National Economic Plan, so Sir Joe has had £100 million from the Savings Bank for his National Economic Plan, which is still a mystery to us.

As I have referred, this company called GEP Ltd also recently borrowed £70 million from the Savings Bank – as I said, a company so mysterious that the Government last week refused to
1415 answer any questions as to what it needed £70 million for or how it would even repay the interest cost. This is the company that is owned by the Gibraltar Development Corporation. We are left in this place with the only option to speculate as to what this money is being used for, so let’s speculate. That is what he wants us to do. He will not give us an answer, so we will speculate. Is this £70 million to build the College of Further Education? Is the £70 million going to be used to
1420 provide loans to the TNG Global Foundation for the Eastside project? Or is this some clever scheme to disguise funding to the GFA, to build the Victoria Stadium? The list is endless. We can all come up with ideas as to what to spend £70 million on, but this is money from the Savings Bank. The Chief Minister cannot get up and pretend that he is protecting the intellectual property or the legal personality of a company that is owned by the Government which he controls. It is
1425 just not credible, but he will persist in his pretence: the parrot is not dead. The Chief Minister told the public that the Budget debate – and I love this one; he should get it framed and put it on his desk – was the ultimate follow-the-money principle. But evidently only when it suits him and the Government. So much for his much-vaunted transparency and accountability, his new dawn. Transparency my foot, Madam Speaker.

In total, at least £150 million of Savings Bank money has been borrowed indirectly by the Government last year, and given what looks like recurrent deficit, it is not a pretty picture. The indirect debt is well over £1.3 billion, so when we add that to our gross direct debt we come to a figure of just under £2.2 billion. This Government cannot continue with the pretence that it is not
1430 borrowing. It *is* borrowing. It knows it is borrowing. Sir Joe knows it is borrowing. He has already called it his financial jungle, with much pride. This is not sustainable, this is not credible, this is simply not right. The people deserve answers.

The Chief Minister, in his address, went on and on about GDP. He boasted – and I really had to hold my tongue – that Gibraltar now has the second highest GDP per capita in the world. Again, we are back to the *Dead Parrot* sketch. I simply do not believe him, and neither does Sir Joe.
1440 Sir Joe, in his address said, ‘No, we don’t do GDP per capita anymore. We work on productivity measures and other economic type measures, but GDP per capita, forget it.’ But the Chief Minister likes it. The Father of the House has repeatedly warned about the dangers of quoting GDP per capita and yet the Chief Minister persists in talking nonsense. Indeed, the use of other ratios, such as debt to GDP, are pretty much irrelevant for an economy of our size and, indeed, do not even
1445 consider the ballooning indirect gross debt of £1.3 billion.

Madam Speaker, in coming to Sir Joe’s National Economic Plan, of which we hear so much and which he wants us to endorse or not endorse – if only we knew what it was – in a recent email to Gibraltar Savings Bank depositors Sir Joe Bossano stated he was deploying funds into Gibraltar’s economy which would ‘at one stage or another’ increase revenue in meeting the rising cost of
1450 public services. But a plan ‘at one stage or another’ is a bit random. That is not what I would call a plan. Yes, I can agree with him as to the rising cost of public services. That is a self-evident truth, it is in the Book and he has long warned about it but obviously it has fallen on deaf ears on that side. But the wishful thinking as to the economic wisdom of his plan has to be questioned. His National Economic Plan is using Savings Bank money, and so far it is a shambles. He has committed
1455 £38 million to the Rooke Nursing Home, which by his own admission is in difficulty with delays, rising costs and cashflow issues with contractors. He cannot explain the economic rationale for funding the Eastern Beach sheds and he continues, unchecked, to use savers’ money for whatever

1460 pet project he considers fit within his so-called National Economic Plan. His financial jungle
continues to grow unabated. It is out of control with no regard to giving any information to this
place. He says, 'No, my Ministry will sponsor the plan but my Ministry does not get involved; the
1465 government money is not used, it is a private company,' but he, effectively, is the mind behind
the companies that are doing all this. He may not be using government money directly but he is
using Savings Bank money, Savings Bank money of which he is the Minister responsible. So, how
can he come to this House and say, 'No, it has nothing to do with me, it is a private company'? It
1470 is just not credible. If anything is to be seen or learnt from the Rooke Nursing Home, it is that Sir
Joe is not always entirely in control of the outcome. He is not an investment guru. He is not Warren
Buffett, as much as we all wish he was.

Talking about Warren Buffett, when we look at the Savings Bank there are several fallacies put
about by this Government that I need to address, finally. The first is transparency, the second is
1475 management and the third is the need for its much-trumpeted reserves. Sir Joe maintains that he
is totally transparent in respect of the activities of the Savings Bank and its investments, but the
fact is he has and continues to refuse to gazette the audited accounts of the Savings Bank for at
least the last five years – 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22 and lastly 2022-23 – and no doubt
he will do the same for 2023-24. These are only in the public domain today because the Principal
1480 Auditor – the report they delayed – took it upon himself, a public servant doing his job properly,
to publish them with his combined report for 2017 and 2018 on pages 61-125. Sir Joe has not
published them; the Principal Auditor published them because Sir Joe would not. It is actually in
the legislation. The Principal Auditor does his work, he gives them to the Minister for the Savings
Bank and the Minister for the Savings Bank is meant to gazette them. Unfortunately, the law does
1485 not say when, and so Joe said, 'Well, you know what? I am not going to do it. I will do it when I
feel like it.' This is what Joe calls transparency – sorry, Sir Joe; I apologise. It is just not credible.

Furthermore, the information that is provided in writing at the various sittings of Parliament is
only provided because I have specifically asked for it. Otherwise, Sir Joe would not, of his own
volition, publish anything in respect of the Savings Bank's investments other than political
1485 messages directed at depositors. Sir Joe, in his recent email to depositors – and I am flattered that
he felt the need to name me twice in a communication to I do not know how many thousand
depositors, but it was no doubt good PR, as Oscar Wilde would say – suggested that a GSD
Government would somehow incur losses in running the Savings Bank. This is utter nonsense. It
is the same nonsense as I regret to say the Minister for Taxation uttered about the GSD being the
1490 party that will tax individuals. It is nonsense and he knows it. I have great respect for him but he
knows it. A careful read of the Principal Auditor's report on page 109 will show, in fact, that Sir Joe
had been incurring technical operating losses in the Savings Bank in 2018-19 and 2021-22 were it
not for the diversion of dividends from Credit Finance Company Ltd and related party dividends.
Sir Joe is not an investment manager; it is not his profession. His use of the Savings Bank money
1495 for government projects while refusing accountability is simply not acceptable in this modern
world and, indeed, should not be allowed.

As to the much-repeated story of the reserves of the Savings Bank and the wonderful story we
keep on hearing, 'Oh my God, we came in, in 2011, they only had £1,000 left in the savings – what
are we going to do?' Well, nothing, Madam Speaker, because there were no implications at all.
1500 The GSD had done nothing wrong in utilising the reserves for the benefit of taxpayers. Indeed, the
Principal Auditor states the following in his reports about the reserves:

The Gibraltar Savings Bank (Amendment) Act 2008, which came into operation on 24th July 2008, provides, *inter alia*, for the surplus in any year to be transferred to the Consolidated Fund provided that the assets of the Gibraltar Savings Bank will thereafter be not less than the liabilities to depositors, as represented by the deposits in the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

This is the important line:

The consequence of the amendment is that it is no longer necessary for the Gibraltar Savings Bank to maintain a reserve balance.

No longer necessary, by law. The Gibraltar Savings Bank (Amendment) Act 2008 was debated at length on 18th July 2008 and it is available in full in *Hansard*. The various amendments at the time restricted the investment of moneys in the safest manner possible to avoid capital losses and thus released reserves which had been previously locked up. We have to remember that 2008 was the year of the global financial crisis. There was £17 million in the reserves at March 2009, which was government money, not depositors' money. The release of this money to the Consolidated Fund, as was discussed in the debate, was earmarked for the construction of government rental housing and used 'for the better benefit of the community at large'. The GSLP voted against this measure, as was their right, but then again I suppose they would not have built the rental housing. But this money was not blown on multimillion-pound music festivals or refurbishing No. 6 or some temporary mural on Ince's Hall, as this Government has been fond of doing in the past. This was used for social benefits for the community.

Today the GSLP boasts of the level of reserves in the Savings Bank as if it were a virtue, that the projected reserves of £76 million for 2023-24 are somehow sacred and they cannot be touched. It is Sir Joe's domain. It cannot be touched by the Consolidated Fund, even at the height of COVID. This rainy day fund cannot be touched. There is no practical purpose in maintaining this surplus, since the Savings Bank, as the Chief Minister said, has a copper-bottom guarantee from the Government – which is true, it is guaranteed by the Government – unless, of course, the Government is worried about Sir Joe's investment abilities and that there is a real risk of loss on the Savings Bank, such as the Rooke project or even their loans to this mysterious GEP.

The Savings Bank has become *de facto* the lender of last resort for this Government and, as such, it means that we in the Opposition have no choice. We have a duty to maintain a constant scrutiny on the activities of the Savings Bank because it distorts public finances. Whereas the GSD in 2008 or 2009 – I am not sure which date they took out £17 million, but they could have left it in there. They could have come up with a special-purpose vehicle like Credit Finance, bought a loan note from Credit Finance and then built the rental housing. That is the way they would have done it, but it ends up in the same pocket. At the end of the day, it is government money. So, to say, 'We came in and there was only £1,000. Oh my God, how terrible!' is nonsense. It is meaningless. There is no legal requirement. That is the people's money anyway. But they built up reserves which they refuse to touch. They would much rather tax the people. The Minister for Taxation may not know this because he was not here, but at the height of the COVID crisis they refused to touch it. In fact, in the Budget session, when the Chief Minister announced he was going to have a 2% tax hike, it was a 2% tax hike on the workers. He did not touch the Savings Bank reserves. This is a rainy day fund which is untouchable. It is just beyond comprehension.

Madam Speaker, when we look at the Budget measures, the Chief Minister has now had two spectacular Budget U-turns to his credit. It might be a record. The first was in the 2022 Budget when he abandoned within 24 hours the proposed £25 per week charge on companies, and the second only yesterday in abandoning the proposed pollution tax on vehicles over 10 years old. You have to ask yourself who on earth advises the Chief Minister when he comes up with these Budget measures. Again, I would encourage his Minister and indeed the Minister for Taxation to revert to the use of Finance Bills. It is not rocket science. A Finance Bill would concentrate the mind and allow for considered debate of each measure. I have heard what the Minister for Taxation has said about his proposed taxation measures, which we will no doubt debate when he brings the Bills to the House that he says are being drafted, but how much more efficient would it be if he had it in front of him today; if in parallel to the Appropriation Bill, which is just spending, he had a Finance Bill? That would be much more efficient. The proposed legislation that he has announced today, tomorrow has no legal effect unless he passes subsidiary legislation by regulation. It is much more efficient and certainly more akin to a modern Parliament that a Finance Bill is presented to the House and then we can debate each clause individually. If he looks back to

the last time we had a Finance Bill – I think it was maybe in the days of Sir Joshua; I cannot remember – he will see that the House can vote for or against each clause. It is quite an efficient way of doing business. It is also a much more professional way of doing business.

1555 I know that the Minister for Taxation is a consummate professional, he takes his job very seriously, but it is one thing to come to this House with ideas and say, ‘We want to do this, we want to do that,’ but in a modern Parliament we should have the Bill in front of us. He will then know exactly what it is that is being proposed, which clauses need amending, how it will all work. It will all be thought out. It is perhaps a waste of the House’s time to have to consider each one
1560 Bill by Bill. I know he wants to continue coming to the House with tax measures outside the budgetary cycle, but if in the budgetary cycle he has, as he has announced today, at least four measures and the Chief Minister has had his own measures as well, we could just roll it all into one Finance Bill and all the measures could be debated and taken as the Bill after the appropriation. There is nothing difficult about that. As I have said before in this House, it would
1565 have the support of the Opposition. It is a fair way of doing business in this House.

Madam Speaker, I note that the Minister for Taxation talked about the domestic top-up plan tax measure, which has our support anyway but I would encourage him to perhaps speed up the drafting of this legislation because companies need to have certainty sooner rather than later. I know he has said a draft by September, but if there is any way he can expedite that, that may
1570 work – of course, we will not meet in August, so probably the earliest that he can possibly bring the Bill to the House is September – because companies need to have that legal certainty as to providing for taxation.

In terms of the measures the Minister has advised, I must confess I was a bit surprised about the student issue because I would have thought the anti-avoidance provisions would have kicked
1575 in there, but if he feels that the entire exemption needs to be redrafted or removed in a certain way, no doubt we will discuss when the Bill comes to the House whether this is perhaps using a sledgehammer to crack a nut or whether there might be some simple anti-avoidance measure that could be used.

We will debate more fully what he has announced as to the accumulated tax losses. Tax losses
1580 are a complex area, so we have to look at how those tax losses were generated, calculated and/or accepted. Although he has talked about carry forward, there are also old provisions about carry back, but those may have ceased some time ago – it is a long time since I practised in the area of tax. Again, we will debate that when the Bills come to the House. The taxation on property sales is an interesting idea which we will no doubt debate when the Bill comes to the House. As to the
1585 skilled employees, again I cannot see anything that would cause any concern, but we will see when we see the detail when it comes to the House. Again, if the Minister wants to conduct business faster, it would be easier if all this was combined into a Finance Bill and we could then debate it all in one go.

Madam Speaker, I raise this point because it is not something that the Minister may be aware
1590 of, but he will be horrified to know that, for example, the last tax amnesty granted by the Government was never legislated for. There was a Bill that came to the House, I think in the last Parliament, and it was never debated, and that Bill in itself was old, so the money collected under that tax amnesty had no legal basis. It happens too often. The Chief Minister stands up and then the Minister for Taxation will stand up and announce a Budget measure. Some of it will happen
1595 by regulation overnight, some of it will not, some of it may be more complex, but what has happened in the past is that there is slippage and people forget, or they do not get around to it. This is not the way to run a modern, efficient tax system, which I understand is what the Minister for Taxation wants to achieve: a modern, well-oiled tax machine. But it has to be fit for purpose. When we bring legislation to this House, we need to do it in a way that makes sense. There is no
1600 point standing up and announcing measures only for the lawyers and the accountants later on to scratch their heads and say, ‘Under what legal provision does this actually come under, because there is no law that has been passed?’ We need to have that legal certainty and it is our job to do that. I would encourage the Minister to try to convince his colleagues ... We are not going to bang

1605 any drums and say, 'Ha, ha.' No, if they come with a Finance Bill, we will say, 'It is fine, it is great,
no problem.' I think it would be good for Parliament and it would be good for business because
the sort of international businesses that we have in Gibraltar are international professionals and
this is what they expect to see. They do not expect to see what is frankly an amateur way of doing
tax. They expect to see a finance Bill, they expect to see it debated, they expect to see it passed
or not passed. It is simple. So, Madam Speaker, let's get our House in order. It is a simple win and
1610 it is not a party political point.

Again, talking about Finance Bills, the Chief Minister in his line 448 states that personal tax will
return to 25% this year, but if we read lines 669 to 672 of his Budget speech for 2023, last year,
the 1% decrease was only for those earning less than £100,000. Is he, then, decreasing the tax
rate for those above £100,000 by 2% this year? He may say, 'Well, it is obvious,' but it is not
1615 entirely clear from reading the speech. A Finance Bill would provide that clarity. Then, of course,
when the Minister for Taxation claims, 'We are the socialist government that looks after the
worker,' I have to point out to him that the Chief Minister just gave him a 2% pay rise because it
applies to all those earning £100,000, if my reading of last year's Budget is correct. A 2% pay rise
for everybody on that side of the House, great. If you own an old car, forget it, you have to pay
1620 £520 – until the U-turn, of course.

In the Chief Minister's address, he has missed the opportunity to redress the tax burden. The
Minister for Taxation tells us, 'I am all for taxing big business,' but what about the big earners?
(**Hon. Chief Minister:** We will.) You will? Well, I am sure the partners in your firm will be delighted,
as will the entire legal community. But that opportunity has been missed. What about rebalancing
1625 the tax burden for the lowest paid and removing them from tax brackets, changing the tax
brackets, and ensuring that not just the big businesses – which is fine, as I say, if you target it
correctly – but those who can afford it pay their fair share. Those who can afford it – those who
have the Porsches, the expensive cars – let them pay a bit more. This is a sentiment I know the
Minister for Tax can identify with, but he seems to be the only one on the Government benches.

1630 Madam Speaker, at the risk of overstaying my welcome – I am coming to the end of my
speech – I want to try something different this year, as I said I would. I want to give the House a
proposed roadmap. The appointment of a Minister for Tax in this new Government is unusual in
that full powers still reside with the Minister for Finance, i.e. the Chief Minister, which means that
the Minister for Tax constitutionally requires the permission of the Minister for Finance for any
1635 proposed taxing legislation. So, if the Minister for Taxation convinced his Government to produce
a Finance Bill he would need the permission of the Chief Minister to introduce it to this House.

It strikes me, and the Minister will forgive me for saying this, that the Hon. Minister for Taxation
has been cast – considering the old Disney cartoon – into the unpleasant role of a tax-collecting
Sheriff of Nottingham for the benefit of the cash-spending King John, or rather the private-jet-
1640 hiring, Porsche-driving Chief Minister. We have a serious problem in the way we are managing our
public finances. We are likely to keep on facing budget deficits and we cannot keep on piling up
indirect debt as if it does not exist or does not matter. We need to control the costs. Sir Joe is the
guy who would come to the House and say, 'We need to control costs,' but we have not heard
from him today on that point. The Minister for Taxation said, 'Well, I need to tax in order to meet
1645 spending,' but how do you control the spending? How much do you need to tax? How much are
you going to spend?

It really is time for an honest conversation between us in this House and with the electorate. I
am seriously tired of the financial nonsense that is presented regularly in this place. I know the
difference between what is financial reality and what is utter fiction. We have limited resources
1650 in Gibraltar and yet we have potentially infinite demands. That is the nature of Government, that
is the nature of public finance. You are never going to have enough money to meet every single
demand, so you need to decide where your priorities are. How do you want to spend the money?
Do you want to spend it on healthcare? Do you want to spend it on education? Do you want to
spend it on £1 million cycle lanes? Where are your priorities?

1655 Fudging the numbers is not going to provide solutions. It does not matter who is in government, whether it is us, them, or somebody else. We need to get real. There is no point pretending. Who are we kidding? Who are we fooling? So, let me suggest a roadmap so we can at least start getting our public finances into shape, because we are in a tailspin and we do not have parachutes. We are all in the same plane together.

1660 Given that the Chief Minister stated several times – although he keeps on forgetting this – that he might stand down soon, I offer this practical advice to his successors and indeed any future Minister for Finance. Firstly – and I have a list of 11 points, Madam Speaker – we are not the only ones to face this kind of situation. I would advise the current Minister for Tax, or anybody who is interested, to look at how Bermuda has established a fiscal responsibility panel and ask the same questions that they ask themselves of ourselves. They ask themselves how is an ageing population going to be looked after, given that healthcare costs are constantly increasing? We should be honest and ask of us all: actually, that is a good point, how are we going to do this? Sir Joe has already alluded to saying we need to reduce our dependence on frontier workers. Fine, but then we need to train the workforce and then we need to do ... These are long-term plans. These are not things that will happen overnight.

1670 We need to do more and perhaps give more respect to the Principal Auditor's reports and address the failings that he identifies and not ignore them. What is the point of him doing his work if reports such as this one after one debate just lie here gathering dust?

1675 We need a Public Accounts Committee – I have said this practically since day one when I came into this House – and we need the Public Accounts Committee to follow up the Principal Auditor's report to consider value for money and other questions. We need to eliminate waste and abuse, actively. Words are easy but we have to be seen to be actively doing it.

1680 Of course, we need to perhaps consider looking at the Estimates Book and saying, 'Is the Estimates Book fit for purpose? Should we be looking at five years? Should we do a five-year projection, even if it is just an academic exercise to see, given our aspirations, how we are going to fund all this, where we are going to be, how much we are going to need and whether we can afford everything?' It is not difficult.

1685 Then, as I have said already, let's have a Finance Bill so that Parliament can properly debate fiscal measures all at one time and provide certainty to businesses. Businesses should not have to phone up their lawyers and accountants and say, 'What is the situation?' and they say, 'Don't ask the question because you may not like the answer, but my understanding is the Commissioner on Tax will do Y.' There should not be any discretion by the Commissioner of Income Tax or anybody else in our Tax Office; there should be legal certainty. Simple.

1690 Madam Speaker, it is our policy, it is not their policy, but I would encourage the separation of the Finance Ministry from the Chief Minister, and we are already starting to see a semblance of that in the appointment of a Taxation Minister. But being the Minister for Taxation is, as I said before, playing Sheriff of Nottingham to King John: you raise the money, they spend it.

1695 Talking about spending money, we need to start setting an example on how money is spent. We need to consider the question of sustainability. What is the point of telling civil servants, 'You need to work more for less,' and they see Government Ministers or senior civil servants having fun, running amok, hiring private jets? Hey, why not? You have to start setting that example. I am sorry he finds it so amusing.

1700 We need to commit to full transparency, audit and publish the full accounts of all government-owned companies, as they are public interest entities. What the Chief Minister has passed as transparency is utter rubbish. The information is of no practical use to the general public, even to me. I can only make out a few lines of any use, and then when I come to this House and ask him directly, 'What is GEP borrowing from?' he says, 'No, I only have to publish what I am required to by company law'. What kind of transparency is that? He is not a hedge fund manager. They are not running a hedge fund; they are in charge of *public* finances. Look it up, it is not private. That is a fiction they want to maintain, yet don't they understand that all it does is generate suspicion? People say, 'Well, why won't they tell you?' ... 'I really don't know – because they just don't feel

1710 like it.' Well, fine, let's just abolish Parliament. They have been elected for four years: make one of them an absolute monarch and give him a crown. Isn't that what they want: absolute power? This is a Parliament. They are meant to come here and answer questions, not say, 'You know what, I am not telling you, I do not feel like it.' This is about public finances, public money, and the public are entitled – and if he does not believe it he only had to look out of his window last night to see the public demanding it.

1715 You have to gazette the full audited accounts of the Savings Bank. The Principal Auditor has already made it public. What is the big deal? You can just gazette them. But, no, Sir Joe will not do it. Fine. You have to review his National Economic Plan and look at it for value for money and risk basis. Sir Joe does not seem to have any concept of risk. I ask him, 'These loan notes you have been buying left, right and centre, is there any security?' 'No, we don't need it, they are all government entities,' or 'I am in control, I know exactly what is going on'. And yet we have heard that the Rooke site is going to pot – I do not know whether that is unparliamentary or not, Madam Speaker; I apologise if it is not.

1720 Lastly – and this is becoming an increasing trend of this Government – you have to review the need to rent private office space. Why is the Government obsessed with renting expensive private office space when it has its own property? Yes, it may need refurbishment, it may need repair, but it does not cost the Government recurrent expense in the way renting for 21 years will do. They have office space around town and yet they persist in renting from the private sector. This is a Government that seems to think it has an endless supply of money, or that the taxpayer – the copper-bottom guarantee – will be happy to bail them out, but the taxpayer will only bail them out if the taxpayer sees that they are acting in their interests, not so they can have plush offices.

1725 Madam Speaker, these are really sound public finance principles, regardless of party politics and who is in charge. So, there you go, that is my constructive contribution to the Government. They may take it on board, or not.

1730 In conclusion, what can I say but this Appropriation Bill falls at the very first hurdle? It does not bear up to scrutiny and certainly it will not have our support. We are running out of financial road and the issues as to financial stability have still not been addressed. I fear that the Minister for Taxation may find his money being wasted quicker than he can raise it.

1735 The problem with this Estimates Book and the problem with the whole presentation of this Budget, the much-acclaimed surplus this year and next year is the Government is just failing to be honest with the people of Gibraltar. They have presented what I can only describe as not an honest Budget, a dishonest Budget. It is dishonest in that it pretends there are surpluses when in fact there are deficits, it is dishonest in that it fails to properly budget for costs realistically, and it is dishonest in that it fails to support those that really need it. This is the hallmark of this GSLP Liberal Government in constantly failing on honesty, transparency and accountability, and so there is nothing further I can say other than that I live in hope that one day we will have an honest and realistic Budget presented in this place, rather than the pathetic car crash we witnessed this week.

1740 Thank you, Madam Speaker. (*Banging on desks*)

Adjournment

1750 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. when we shall have the speech of the Hon. the Minister for Health.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 10 a.m.

1755 I now put the question, which is that this House do adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.
Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.
This House will now adjourn to tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.10 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 10.00 a.m. – 12.55 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 3rd July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 10 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

The Appropriation Act 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 3rd July 2024.
Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024 continued.

5

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mrs Arias-Vasquez.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, thank you.

I note that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not here and I just want to put on the record that he did message last night and inform me of the reasons that he was not here and apologise. So I just wanted to note that.

But, Madam Speaker, given that this is the first Budget debate in the history of the House presided over by a woman, before I begin my speech let me say that I, and indeed every female in Gibraltar, am grateful to the Leader of the Opposition for reducing the first time that a female appeared at the United Nations to defend Gibraltar's right to self-determination to a photo opportunity. I am sure, Madam Speaker, that all the women of Gibraltar join me in thanking the Hon. Mr Azopardi for his generous political mansplaining.

I understand his need to make a political meal out of something that in reality is no such thing. However, Madam Speaker, I assure you that I and every other woman in Gibraltar are *far* more than a photo opportunity.

So, Madam Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to deliver my first Budget address to this House. It is indeed a real privilege to do so as the Minister for Health, the Elderly Residential Service, the Care Agency, Quality of Care, Public Health, Business, Town Planning, Procurement, the Utilities, the Port and the Maritime Administration. I hate to say this but because of the number of portfolios and the breadth there is between them this will be a long speech.

Madam Speaker, as you know, it is no secret that throughout the election campaign last year, I clamoured for the Health portfolio. I said that I wanted the Health portfolio, Madam Speaker, because the experience of watching my son fight for his life at a neonatal unit in Spain had a huge impact on my family and me. It made me experience first-hand the vulnerabilities of our healthcare system and the critical need for comprehensive support for families facing such crises.

I do not apologise for the fact that this experience has shaped who I am. It has also made me appreciate how lucky we are to live in Gibraltar.

Becoming the Minister for Health, Care and Business is not just a political appointment for me. It is a commitment to ensuring that no family goes through what my family and I endured. I am constantly in touch with families who are in difficulties, listening to what their issues are. My Ministry now calls those Gibraltarians in Calpe House or any tertiary institution on a weekly basis

to ask if they require any assistance. We will show those people that we remember them and that we care. I want to listen.

40 Madam Speaker, every decision I make as a Minister for Health is influenced by the memories I have of those dark days in the Neonatal Unit and the resilience of my son, Andrew. Those lessons are not just personal. They are the driving force behind my dedication to deliver a healthcare system that is a pillar of support for everyone, especially during their most vulnerable moments.

45 Change, however, does not always happen at a pace that one would like. Change therefore is and will continue to be an ongoing process, a forward-moving propulsion of constant improvement. So, Madam Speaker, every decision I have taken to date, everything I have already announced in relation to the Health and Care portfolio, and everything I will set out in my Budget speech today has been done with the interests of patients and service users at heart.

50 Although, Madam Speaker, important though this portfolio is, this will not only be a Budget address solely about Health. I will also, of course, try to set out in as much detail as possible all the work I am doing alongside the most incredibly hard-working individuals in the many Departments falling under my ministerial portfolio.

55 Initially, when I was given this portfolio, Madam Speaker, it looked enormous. However, what a portfolio this size does do is it gives you the opportunity to learn how Gibraltar works. It gives you an oversight into the synergies of the different portfolios and how they interact. It has been a steep learning curve into how Gibraltar operates. Simultaneously, it works to illustrate that no portfolio is a silo, and the Government works at its best when it is working as a whole.

Although, Madam Speaker, it is not possible without being here all day to mention everything we are doing at the GHA, at the Port, in town planning, at ERS, at the Care Agency, at Public Health, at AquaGib, at GibElec, in Business, at the OFT and in Procurement, I will try.

60 So I guess it is probably a good moment to thank the Chief Minister for his trust in me by giving me this rather large and, I will say, challenging portfolio. As I have said, I consider it a great honour and I will do my level best in trying to make significant and positive changes to the areas for which I am responsible. I must also, of course, Madam Speaker, mention that I am constituency MP for the Westside Area. Although it is not a ministerial portfolio in the traditional sense, it is something
65 which the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister introduced after the last elections and which I really enjoy.

I have already held various specific constituency clinics and have met with countless constituents when they have requested to see me. I have an open-door policy and take this opportunity to remind those living in the Westside Area that they can arrange a meeting with me
70 by emailing Westsidearea@gibraltar.gov.gi.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to my first ministerial Portfolio, the Gibraltar Health Authority. This is, without a shadow of doubt, the portfolio that takes up most of my time, and you would expect that, Madam Speaker.

75 Healthcare is something that affects each and every one of us at some point in our lives. It affects us both directly and indirectly, and it is personal. When you interact with the Gibraltar Health Authority, it is normally because you have a problem. When you have a health-related problem, you quickly realise that nothing else matters. It is therefore my responsibility to ensure that we continue to develop and modernise the GHA, to ensure it develops the world-class service we expect it to, with the world-class funding it receives.

80 Madam Speaker, I think we should pause to reflect on the fact that this year nearly £211 million will be spent on the Health and Social Care budget; *£211 million*. Let me be bold enough to stop here for a second and explain the discrepancy between this figure and the figure provided by the Hon. Mr Clinton yesterday.

85 I do not intend to teach my grandmother to suck eggs, Madam Speaker, but I think it is important to note where we got the difference in this figure. The figure he gave yesterday is the figure in the Appropriation Bill, which is a figure for the Health and Social Care budget, which is where the Hon. Mr Clinton got the figure of £207 million. So the figure of £207 million, which is in

the Appropriation Bill, is not quite the amount which HMGoG is giving to the GHA, the ERS and the Care Agency.

90 So if I take the Hon. Member to page 205 of the estimates, the figure given to the GHA to spend is actually £156,430,000. The figure given to the ERS to spend on page 213 is £26,078,000. And the Care Agency figure is £28,183,000. The total, therefore, given to these three portfolios is £210,691,000. The error, therefore, arises from an error which I myself made, so I can understand how the hon. Member opposite made it. The error is because the figure in the Appropriation Bill
95 does not take into account the figure which is actually contributed from the Social Assistance Fund, which is £3.5 million, and the Statutory Benefit Fund, which is another £697 million.

So, Madam Speaker, I think it is important, because if we are to be accused of massaging numbers, if we are to be accused of not giving appropriate figures, we have to at least start from the same basis point. So the figure which is given to the GHA, ERS and the Care Agency by
100 Government is not £207 million, as stated by the hon. Member opposite, it is £211 million.

I would not ordinarily have the temerity, being a mere lawyer, to argue with an accountant on numbers, but given that I made the same error and I actually went and double-checked and I saw the figures were different when I added them up, I asked the Financial Secretary late at night – so sorry about that, Financial Secretary – and he explained why these two figures did not quite add
105 up. I thought it was important that we at least depart from the correct premise.

Madam Speaker, let me contrast that to the 2011-12 budget for the GHA and the Care Agency, as it was then called, which included the Care Agency at the time. The joint figure in 2011-12 was £96,058,000. To split that up, the budget for the Care Agency and what was then the equivalent of the ERS was £17,178,000. Today, the budget for the Care Agency alone, excluding the Elderly
110 Residential Services, is £28,183,000, with a further £26,078,000 spent on the ERS. I think that puts everything in perspective. It shows the level of investment in our people that this Government is willing to make.

Let me take you one further, Madam Speaker. The Hon. Member stood here before us on Monday and stated that the GHA overspend was outrageous. That was the Leader of the
115 Opposition. The Hon. Mr Clinton said the same thing. This message was then repeated on Question Time last night.

I would remind the House that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health from 1996 to 2000, and in each and every one of those years, there was an overspend when the budget of the GHA was between £22 million and £27 million. Madam Speaker, with an eighth of
120 the budget that we currently have, there was an overspend of between 5% and 8% per annum. But I am proud to form part of a Government that puts its money where its mouth is and invests heavily into healthcare.

Whilst I am often told that this is not enough, we need to stop and take stock of just how much that budget is and focus on how absolutely amazing it is that we have that budget. Globally,
125 healthcare is under significant pressure. As countries around the world continue their post-pandemic recovery, they are facing increasing pressures due to ageing populations, populations with comorbidities and significant workforce shortages. Indeed, workforce pressures will be the most significant issue faced by the health and care sector over the coming years, with countries competing globally to attract the appropriate number of trained and experienced staff. Despite
130 these quite significant pressures, I am immensely proud of the fact that the GHA continues to improve and evolve to meet the post-pandemic needs of our community.

Madam Speaker, in this address today, I intend for the benefit of the Members opposite, and indeed for anyone watching, to set out the main achievements of this past financial year and the aspirations and the challenges that we expect to face in this next financial year across the GHA's
135 main service sectors. I also intend to explain why the figures in the Budget Book are the way they are. They are not meant to hide figures. They are not meant to massage any budgets or anything. They have been arrived to as conscious decisions and I intend to explain it as I go through my budget.

140 Madam Speaker, as hon. Members opposite will have seen, earlier this year I announced the commencement of a consultation for a significant Health and Care restructure. I am pleased to report to the House that the consultation is going well, with meetings with the unions, both Unite the Union and the GGCA, taking place every two weeks, as well as *ad hoc* meetings with other stakeholders. The proposed restructure, Madam Speaker, has been carefully thought out and specifically designed to improve services and increase efficiency in what is the largest area of public expenditure.

145 As from September 2024, I will be taking over as Chairperson of the GHA Board. I will be appointing the Chief Secretary as its Vice-Chair. The Financial Secretary will also be appointed as a board member. This will provide, in my view, the necessary oversight expected from a Health and Care budget of £211 million a year. Yes, once again, Madam Speaker, £211 million. By joining the board, it brings policy closer to the GHA, but it also helps Government understand the issues faced by the GHA.

150 Madam Speaker, I make no apology for the fact that I consider it my aim and indeed my duty to make sure that every single pound spent in that budget is used to its absolute maximum effect for patients and service users. My role is to continue to develop policies which expand services whilst always keeping an eye on costs and ensuring that we are being efficient with our resources. Indeed, we are introducing an internal audit function in the hospital to ensure that this is the case. As is appropriate in a Budget speech, I will go into detail on how this will be done later on in the speech.

155 At the GHA Board meeting held in April, Prof. Ian Cumming just announced his intention to step down at the end of his term in June. Madam Speaker, given Prof. Cumming's exceptional knowledge and experience, I have asked him to continue to support me as Minister for Health and also the GHA in an advisory capacity going forwards. We will seek advice from professionals when their expertise will deliver a better service in a more streamlined manner and assist us to save costs. I am happy to say this, despite criticisms from the benches opposite.

160 I would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Cumming on behalf of the Government and I am sure the whole House for his work during his time as Interim Chair of the GHA Board and, in particular, for his work in assisting us with the fight against COVID. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) I am therefore very pleased that Prof. Cumming was bestowed the Gibraltar Award in May by the former Governor, Vice-Admiral Sir David Steel.

165 Madam Speaker, I want to make something abundantly clear. We are not re-politicising the GHA. The GHA will remain completely and entirely clinically independent and us politicians will not be able to interfere with any clinical decisions whatsoever. This will be set out in an accountability agreement, which I intend to publish before the changes take place later this year. But there does have to be a closer interaction between those delivering on policy and those who set it. The GHA and HMGoG have to work hand-in-glove to ensure administrative and policy oversight.

170 Madam Speaker, I emphasise again the Government's involvement as Chair of the board will be focused on setting of policy and budgetary oversight. I will also be publishing, Madam Speaker, a patient charter, setting out patients' rights and responsibilities within our healthcare services and to show that we are serious about these things, the Government is serious about enshrining this charter into law. I am pleased to report that the drafting of such a charter has already commenced and I expect to be in a position to publish it later this year.

175 Additionally, as part of the consultation, we are reviewing what changes are required of the existing Gibraltar Health Authority Act. At this stage, Madam Speaker, it is envisaged that the Care Agency CEO will form part of the Gibraltar Health and Care Authority's Board. In my view, Madam Speaker, this is essential to ensure that all three heads of the patient and service user services are sat around one table, discussing policies and pathways to improve the services for the patient. This was highlighted by the Mental Health Board in their annual report as a way of improving mental health services in Gibraltar and has been raised with me by NGOs, such as the Gibraltar Mental Welfare Society, and I could not agree more.

Madam Speaker, as I have said time and time again regarding these proposed changes to our health and care services, none of these changes will result in anyone losing their job. That is absolutely not what we are doing. In fact, I was happy to provide the unions with these assurances when we first met, ahead of my Health and Care restructure announcement in April of this year. We are proposing these changes to further improve the service, to modernise the service and to make health care and social care provision more seamless across the board and to future-proof the service. All of these changes, as I have already said, are being designed with the interests of patients as our primary focus.

Madam Speaker, before I continue, this House will know that in December I announced that the previously published plans to redevelop the entrance to St Bernard's Hospital using the COVID-19 Fund would not go ahead, given the response received from the public and presented to the Government via a petition. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, countless individuals and commercial entities donated money to assist the GHA in its fight against the pandemic. This money was consolidated into a special fund and has to date not been used.

The COVID-19 Fund currently stands at £2.7 million. Earlier this year, I announced a public consultation on the use of the COVID-19 Fund. I am pleased to report that we have had an excellent response to this public consultation, with approximately 100 responses, many of which have been carefully thought through and are extremely detailed.

I have therefore appointed a referral panel, consisting of both healthcare professionals and lay people, to look into these cases and recommend to me how the £2.7 million should be spent. The panel has now convened to determine the feasibility of the responses.

Madam Speaker, I should mention though, at this stage, that it is the Government's intention to distribute the money as widely as possible and not spend the £2.7 million on a single project, as was previously announced.

I would like to thank the public for engaging with us at the Ministry for Health on this, and I look forward to making an announcement after the summer on how exactly this money will be spent, breaking it down to the penny in order to be completely transparent.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to acute services at St Bernard's Hospital. The modernisation of the GHA's acute services under the Reset, Restart and Recover banner continued apace during 2023-24. Successful waiting list initiatives, new pathways of care and significant capital developments all took place throughout the year.

Madam Speaker, just to put some of these waiting list initiatives into context: in January 2023 there was an average of a 96-week wait for a hip and knee clinic appointment. The latest figures provided to me are now at 9 weeks. This is a reduction of 87 weeks' waiting time. Madam Speaker, for routine endoscopy procedures the waiting times have dropped from 34 weeks to 6 weeks in the same period. Whilst I accept that there is definitely more yet to be done, this is a significant step in the right direction.

Madam Speaker, the 16-year-long-term strategic partnership with Philips in the form of a maintenance equipment service contract is now in place. A mobile X-ray unit, six ultrasound systems and a brand new fluoroscopy unit for real-time moving X-ray imagery have been installed and are already in use. After a very successful first 12 months, this has been expanded beyond diagnostics with over 300 pieces of legacy equipment, including ventilators and monitoring equipment, on-boarded on to the contract.

Madam Speaker, the design for the new Cath Lab is now complete, and works on the construction and installation that began in May. As I confirmed in Parliament only last week, work is also apace to staff the new Cath Lab, with recruitment continuing.

As I announced earlier this year, to mark Cardiac Awareness Month, the Government is committed to delivering the Cath Lab during the third quarter of this year, Madam Speaker, and I am happy to announce that we are expecting this to be ready on schedule. This means that angiograms with the potential to introduce stents will now be done in Gibraltar.

I was delighted to have visited the site together with the Gibraltar Cardiac Association in May to see for ourselves the commencement of the works. This is an important service development

and it is a crucial part of the Government's commitment to deliver more services locally if it is safe and beneficial to do so. We said we would repatriate, and that is precisely what we are doing.

245 Madam Speaker, once this new Cath Lab is online, patients will be transferred from A&E to the Cath Lab in approximately 90 seconds. This is not just political. This saves lives. This will save
Gibraltarian lives and, unfortunately, everyone in this room will at some point have a family
member affected and will thank His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar for this initiative.
(Interjections) A remarkable improvement to the current situation, which involves having to be
250 transferred to a tertiary institution in Spain, with the consequential delays that that could involve.

No Government has repatriated the amount of services that we have back to Gibraltar, and we are committed to continuing to do so. We want our people to go to Europort for world-class services and to be able to go to the comfort of their own home after having received treatment.

255 Unfortunately, I know from personal experience quite how difficult it is to travel with a sick family member back and forth to the UK for treatment. Although I must say, Madam Speaker, that for those of us who must do so, we are absolutely blessed to be able to use the magnificent facilities at Calpe House, Gibraltar's home away from home.

Separately, we have launched a cancer-tracking service in conjunction with the Breast Clinic which, following positive feedback, will be rolled out to other specialities in due course.

260 We are also making considerable progress with the digitisation of our patient records, which is already providing vast improvements to the way that we operate, by making patient records more easily available to clinicians.

265 We have carried out a major review of all our stocks and stores control systems and have introduced automated dispensing cabinets and electronic stores management and stock control and procurement systems.

270 Madam Speaker, last month I was delighted to visit the theatres and the stores team to see for myself the new Omnicell stock-control system. I am continuously speaking about this in Parliament and therefore I thought it was important to go and see what this actually looked like. Standing here and describing it does not quite do credit to the system. I would be more than happy to invite the Hon. Shadow Minister for Health, Ms Ladislaus, to attend with me to see for herself how this new stock control system functions. Put simply, it is a fully automated stock-control system which assists greatly with the management of medical supplies.

275 In effect, the Omnicell system is a huge system which acts like a huge dispensing machine where items get dispensed individually. This is then recorded online to have an accurate control of stock.

280 Madam Speaker, the GHA's Theatre Department has been the first Department to see this new system introduced, with staff telling me they are extremely happy with it. Not only does the system assist with stock management and procurement, but it has the added benefit of freeing up clinical staff who would otherwise need to be dedicating time to the purchasing and management of stock levels.

Additionally, this new system flags low stock and allows the GHA to purchase items that are essential, which in turn has a positive impact in reducing the amount of cancellations that take place at theatres as a result of lack of stock in a particular area. Operations cancelled for this reason are now the exception, I am pleased to say.

285 Madam Speaker, although we began the roll-out of this new system in the GHA's Theatre Department for obvious reasons, the intention is to continue this roll-out over the coming months to the entire GHA. This is a slow process which has already proven to provide hugely positive results, not only in terms of cost saving and reduction in medicinal waste, but also in terms of resource allocation and reduction in cancellations.

290 We will be in a position to confirm quite how much will be saved later on this year, but initial indications, Madam Speaker, suggest that this could be in the region of saving up to 40% in terms of medical supplies. This is a great example of how money can be saved with an improvement made to patient outcomes with no negative impact at all on patient services.

295 Madam Speaker, we are listening to our clinicians. It is interesting to note that our budget submissions are prepared long before 18th June, the date the Hon. Lady opposite's article in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*. I want to explain the lines in the Budget to show how we are actually doing exactly what she said that she would want to see done in terms of the use of locums in the system, or rather the use of consultants in the system and the reduction of the number of locums in the system.

300 Let me take you through this and let me take you through the benefit – let me take you through this as well for the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition, who believes that we are massaging the numbers in terms of locums. If you look at the detail of the complement on pages 201 and 202 of the Book, the complement of medical and allied professionals is now 258.5 from 242.5 in 2023-24.

305 Madam Speaker, if you go through the list, there is a complete breakdown of all the clinicians that we are increasing in their number this year, year-on-year. What we have sought to do in the Budget this year, Madam Speaker, is precisely what that article said that we should be doing, when the figures already said that that is what we were doing. So what we are doing is that we are increasing the complement of clinicians in the GHA to increase the number of those on fixed-term contracts so that we decrease the number of locums in the budget.

310 So when the Leader of the Opposition says that we have reduced the line for locums in the Budget, he is entirely correct. We have reduced the spend on locums this year, as can be seen from line 12 in the Estimates Book. We have reduced that line because we have increased the salaries line, because we have increased the number of consultants in the GHA. So we are not massaging figures, we are not trying to hide anything from the Opposition. We are actually working with clinicians and working with what clinicians are telling us to do in order to better improve the services of the GHA.

315 For the same reason, Madam Speaker, visiting consultants have also been reduced by the sum of £120,000. Once again, I have spoken about the repatriation of services to Gibraltar. We are therefore having to bring fewer visiting consultants over to Gibraltar because we are bringing the services to Gibraltar. So the reduction of lines in the Budget is being done in a calculated and controlled manner, working in step with the GHA and the clinicians in the GHA who are telling us that this is beneficial.

320 You see, Madam Speaker, locums are often expensive as they frequently charge more than consultants, doctors and nurses employed on fixed-term contracts. We also have to supply accommodation for such locums. Locums are also here for a short period of time. So if I give you an example, the Morrison's factor does not exist when it comes to locums. I will not bump into a locum and recognise him as a person who is treating my mother because I do not know who he is. He is here on a short-term contract.

330 If we increase the number of clinicians, if we increase the number of consultants who are on fixed-term contracts, as we have stated that we will do in the Budget Book, what that means is that the continuity of care will be there. These are not just things I am saying, Madam Speaker. These are things that can be followed in the Budget Book. So if you go line by line through the Budget Book, as the Members opposite have been provided with, you will see that what I am saying is actually what is reflected in these figures.

335 Madam Speaker, we also carried out a review of our Pathology Lab practices and output, which has led to improvements in how services are delivered. The brilliant team at the lab, who I publicly thank here today, have carried out over 3.2 million tests last year. That is a remarkable statistic, Madam Speaker.

340 Additionally, our patients can now enjoy a purpose-built Day Infusion Unit with extra capacity for the care of our patients. We started our new trauma network with King's Trauma Centre in the UK and have already had our first patient airlifted there. Additionally, we have opened a new Laminar Flow Theatre where we can undertake more complex procedures in specialties such as orthopaedics.

345 Importantly, Madam Speaker, we are investing in training our people. I have said this numerous times in Parliament. We will be running a course for advanced healthcare practitioners in order to train 30 nurses in the next two years. This will assist in freeing up capacity in A&E and will provide us with resilience at the Hospital. We need to look to train more Gibraltarians and we are committed to doing so.

350 Madam Speaker, two new front-line ambulances were delivered in 2023-24, with a further two front-line vehicles and a new High Dependency Unit vehicle purchased for delivery in 2024-25. These new ambulances are now expected to arrive after the summer and I am advised that these three new vehicles will be operational from the day they arrive in Gibraltar.

355 Additionally, Members opposite will recall that a new ambulance dispatch system was introduced at the GHA on 30th April 2024. The dispatch of the ambulances has moved from the Fire Service and is now undertaken by the GHA. This new system is based upon international best practice, with the introduction of an initial clinical triage process, which will prioritise the dispatch of ambulances to the sickest patients first. The new dispatch system is a significant undertaking and I would like to thank the entire team for their hard work and professionalism in ensuring the smooth handing over and enhancement of the system.

360 Madam Speaker, as we move into 2024-25, planning and design is well under way for the new chemotherapy suite and the aseptic suite, and I really look forward to seeing those coming to fruition over the coming year or so. In order to assist this House on current planning, the completion date for the new chemotherapy suite is early 2025. The new suite will greatly enhance the service users' experience and make the journey for those with cancer that little bit easier.

365 Madam Speaker, this is a huge development, of which we should be rightly proud. The new suite is larger, making the overall patient experience better and will improve service provision.

370 I must stress again because this is important. Everything we are doing in healthcare is being done with the interest of patients as our primary focus. We are looking to upgrade our endoscopy equipment and replace wash kits to ensure that we have state-of-the-art medical kits.

Regarding our Day Surgery Unit, the GHA is always exploring ways on how to improve this unit by increasing its throughput and ensuring more activity is undertaken locally as day cases rather than patients being transferred to Spain or the United Kingdom. The Day Surgery Unit is one that I often receive praise for, Madam Speaker, and they are a great team which offer brilliant services.

375 Madam Speaker, the 2023-24 financial year was extremely busy for the GHA, with some headline activity figures being as follows. A&E attendances saw a 4.4% increase in activity between 2023-24, yet in spite of this overall A&E performance still remains excellent.

380 I think that with the introduction of the new minor injuries unit at A&E, which with two young boys I have had to use on more than one occasion, combined with the exceptionally phenomenal work carried out by A&E staff 365 days a year, the experience for A&E is significantly improved and I will support them to continue to improve, although I accept that we can, of course, still do more and more we will do.

385 If you look at the number of cases going through theatres, you can appreciate the year-on-year increase in activity and productivity that is being delivered. In the financial year 2022-23, there were 3,576 cases operated. In the financial year 2023-24, there were 3,888 cases operated locally. This represents a 9% increase in activity year on year. In all of these areas, the additional activity represents real people who have been treated. As we look forward, the GHA will continue to be diligent in reviewing all of its waiting lists and times to ensure our communities receive the best and the timeliest service possible.

390 Madam Speaker, we are looking at ways to allow our consultants and divisional leads more autonomy with their budgets. Starting with theatres, we will be looking to pilot a scheme to devolve all budgets to divisional heads. We will look to empower them, whilst being able to hold them to account on departmental expenditure. This is very important as we are asking those very teams to improve efficiencies.

395 Separately, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that the GHA is there for those who have consistently paid into the system. We need to be conscious and protect that which we have, as it

really is a great system. For this reason, we are, firstly, strengthening the administration and accounts team to ensure that all non-entitled patients are properly charged when using our Hospital. We are, secondly, strengthening the supporting legislation. This is in no way intended to catch people out when their health card is expired and they are a couple of months out. It is intended to ensure that those who are travelling from abroad pay for the services they receive.

The aim here, Madam Speaker, is to ensure that the world class services are provided to those Gibraltar residents who are entitled to healthcare because, as anyone who travels outside Gibraltar knows, if you go to any other healthcare system in the world, you are likely to be asked for payment and insurance details before healthcare is provided. That, Madam Speaker, is a source of revenue that we must ensure is not lost, particularly when we are already and continuously providing care to these individuals.

That is a summary of acute services. It is important to note that acute services are your first port of call with the GHA when you are seriously ill. Ensuring a streamlined service in theatres, A&E and the other acute areas means that the overall experience with the GHA will be much improved. Investing in our acute services will ensure timely diagnosis treatment plans, which improve patient care, reducing complications and ultimately reducing cost in this area.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to a hugely important, and often controversial, area of our healthcare system: primary care. The Primary Care Centre saw 144,267 GP appointments in 2023-24, which was up from 132,408 in 2022-23. That is a 9% increase. That is a slightly startling average of 12,022 appointments a month.

On a less positive but very important note, I would also like to mention the 17.7% increase in missed GP appointments, which is a poor use of valuable clinical time and a waste of resources and is an area which we will focus upon in this coming year. The number of missed GP appointments in the last financial year has equated to 3.8% of all appointments. In reality, that equates to an average of 459 appointments every single month being wasted, with no one able to take up those slots.

Madam Speaker, I have tasked the GHA Director General and his team at the PCC to propose ways in which the Government can attempt to reduce this figure and I look forward to making announcements on this in coming months.

The increases in activity year-on-year show no signs of abating and we are predicting similar increases in activity all across the GHA areas in 2024-25. Despite this increasing demand, access to see a GP in Gibraltar is good; but do not get me wrong, I fully accept that we can improve this even further and I am currently looking at ways to achieve this. We need to stop the mad scramble for appointments at eight o'clock in the morning. To assist us to achieve this, we will be appointing someone tasked to do this by the end of summer.

We are actively looking at ways in which we can increase access without increasing cost. The use of advanced healthcare practitioners and advanced paramedics can take the pressure off, for example. I am very proud that we have recently appointed five senior paediatric support workers who are the foundation of the neurodevelopmental pathway, linking with psychiatrists, paediatricians, speech and language therapists, occupational therapists and dieticians to provide better support for parents and schools. These will assist in delivering the neurodevelopmental pathway.

Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that we have now shared this document with the Opposition – Ms Ladislaus and Ms Sanchez in particular – and we are looking to release this as soon as possible after the Budget, once we have had a chance to sit down with them and go through their comments.

This financial year has also begun with a review of the administrative processes in the PCC, as well as the GHA more generally, with the objective of improving further the access to GPs. During the year 2024-25 I am very keen to develop a primary prevention strategy for Gibraltar that will cover all of our screening programmes and be based upon a Covenant for Health between individuals, our communities, HMGoG, charities, the private sector and the Health and Care agencies. This work will focus upon keeping people fitter and stronger for longer in their own

450 home settings and out of the Hospital because, Madam Speaker, prevention is *always* better than
cure. The Director General and the Director of Public Health are already working upon a Covenant
for Health for Gibraltar, which I expect to be in a position to publish before the end of the year,
and more on that in a little while.

455 Madam Speaker, I now turn to the mental health provision in Gibraltar. I recently brought a
motion related to mental health to Parliament, and I appeared on a GBC *Viewpoint* programme,
together with the hon. Member opposite, Ms Ladislaus, last month. I am not shying away from
criticism when it comes to mental health. It is true to say that we have come a long way, but
I absolutely accept that there is a lot more that needs to be done and I am determined to tackle
the issue head on.

460 We are looking to take the final steps set out in the Mental Health Strategy produced in 2021.
Mental Health Services have seen significant change and development over this past year. I will
attempt to set out some of the most significant changes.

465 Madam Speaker, I am delighted to confirm that we have identified a building in the town centre
which will house the new CMHT. The building is located right at the heart of the town, albeit in a
discreet location. It is a beautiful art-deco building with lots of light, which historically has had to
have a huge entrance installed, which is perfect to make this building wheelchair accessible.

The entrance had to be created, you see, to allow the printing presses to enter the building.
It is a building linked to a library, the Garrison Library. We will be refurbishing the old *Gibraltar
Chronicle* printing press building to accommodate the new community mental health facility.
However, this will not purely be a 'lift and shift' of the current services.

470 We will be using the opportunity of the relocation to deliver a whole new model of care,
integrating physical and mental health and which will provide support for employment,
accommodation, rehabilitation, therapies, and financial advice. It is intended to be a net to ensure
that people find the support they need *in* the community, so that matters do not escalate until
they then require hospitalisation and that they do not fall through the net.

475 All of this is largely to be done through the donations of a benefactor, which I think is important
for the Hon. Mr Clinton to hear. This benefactor will be providing the lion's share of the funding.
A short video showing the location will be uploaded on to the Government's social media page
shortly to show the exact location. We will be commencing the design phase of this project shortly.

480 Madam Speaker, the Housing Outreach Team is a newly developed team who have been in
post since early last year. They provide oversight on all houses belonging to clients with severe
and enduring mental health concerns, both in private and in Government housing. The service
monitors cleanliness of houses, together with furnishings, basic needs, etc. They make sure that
patients are up to date on the utility bills, their personal paperwork; for example, ID, passport,
GHA health cards, etc. The Housing Outreach Team established recently have served as a
485 reinforcement for preventing inappropriate admissions, thereby proving success in the
community.

The Gibraltar Young Minds team has undergone a significant transformation. They now have
one registered mental health nurse, two enrolled nurses, two counsellors, one child psychologist,
two psychiatrists, and one part-time external child psychiatrist. I am pleased to inform the House
490 that the restructure has greatly reduced the waiting list for children to be seen within the service.
This year, on average, the time for referral from first contact to time with the team was two weeks.

The Gibraltar Young Minds team conduct allocation meetings every week attended by all
professionals within the team, together with the Head of Child Social Services and a representative
from the Department of Education. This process reinforces accountability and governance to all
495 referrals made to the service.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at Gibraltar Young Minds for their
efforts and dedication to improving our children's mental health services. We look forward to
further improvements this coming year.

500 Madam Speaker, the GHA has a newly appointed Clinical Governance Lead who will ensure a
framework is developed where mental health services are accountable for continuously improving

the quality of care and to safeguard the quality of our service. There will be quarterly reports delivered to the GHA Board, promoting accountability and transparency. We will be exploring different options here to optimise access to that service.

505 I am pleased to announce the first ever registered mental health nurse training is due to commence in September 2024, which will be running for three consecutive years. The BSc programme has been developed to meet Gibraltar's local needs and is in line with the Mental Health Strategy 2021-2026, where we emphasise care in the community over hospital admissions.

510 Turning to sponsored patients, our Sponsored Patient Department overseas expenditure is currently £11 million annually and this Department is responsible for ensuring patients receive good clinical care from tertiary services in both Spain and the UK.

515 Madam Speaker, the reality is that we are a small Hospital which is dependent on tertiary centres. Over the past few years, Gibraltar has successfully repatriated services both from Spain and the UK, one other example of this being that in 2023 we undertook our first local cochlear implant. During 2024-25, we will continue to review all external referrals with a view to repatriating services where it is safe to do so, but also to ensure that we are getting the maximum return for our money.

520 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition criticised the fact that this budget has been reduced, and referred to it as one of the examples of us massaging the figure. The reason why this budget has been reduced, if I take you to it – it is currently in line 39 of the Book. It has been reduced from £16.06 million to £11 million. The reason for this is simple. We are repatriating services to Gibraltar and, therefore, the need to send patients abroad should be lessened.

525 However, this service is patient led and we will not shy away from sending patients to tertiary institutions if this is required. Therefore, if there is over-expenditure under this Head, it is because it is required because it is a patient-led service.

Let us once again not forget that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Health between 1996 and 2000. In every single year that he was the Minister for Health there was an overspend in this section of the Budget. So yes, we have allocated a budget of £11 million against a forecast outturn in 2023-24 of £16.06 million.

530 But to give one example, in 1998-99, there was an overspend of 20.83% by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, from a budget of £1.9 million to a spend of £2.4 million. This also gives an idea of the enormous growth that we have enabled in this Budget.

535 Despite repatriating activity, we will continue to need the support of external providers in both the UK and in Spain as there will be certain specialist procedures that it is neither safe nor cost effective to undertake in Gibraltar. With this in mind, the Sponsored Patient Department has been reviewing all of our external arrangements with a view to improving the services offered to our patients. If any external centre does not meet our exacting requirements, we will have no hesitation in moving services to another provider; and, Madam Speaker, we have indeed done so.

540 During 2023-24, the GHA have also entered into an arrangement with a local private provider, GibMed, for the provision of MRI scans locally, thereby increasing the provision of diagnostic services offered locally. Whilst there were some teething issues here, the service we hope is now up and running again, with patients now being sent to the new facility.

545 Madam Speaker, as with most western countries, Gibraltar is seeing an increase in its elderly population. We are lucky within Gibraltar that elderly care services are provided by Elderly Residential Services and that ERS is always looking to improve and develop its services to meet the needs of our communities. I would like to draw the House's attention to a number of important initiatives that took place over the course of the last year at ERS.

550 Firstly, the Government launched a new Dementia Strategy that is aimed at co-ordinating all local resources to improve the quality of care for dementia patients. I am sure the Dementia Strategy will be very impactful and a steering group has been set up under the leadership of the Director General.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Gibraltar Alzheimer's and Dementia Society, which until very recently was so ably led by the late Daphne Alcantara, for their work throughout

555 the year, alongside our National Dementia Co-ordinator, on all matters dementia related. The National Dementia Co-ordinator was something GADS – and Daphne in particular – had been lobbying Government on for some time, and I am delighted to say that, as part of the Dementia Strategy, a dementia-qualified person has been appointed to this role. This is just part of the legacy which Daphne leaves behind and which was so clearly demonstrated across Gibraltar, not least with the symbolic lighting of the Moorish Castle in purple, the colours of GADS, following her sad, untimely passing.

560 As I have mentioned in the past, the Government is committed, as set out in our manifesto, to working with GADS on all matters dementia related. We will be looking to further develop the Dementia Strategy with the assistance of the relevant clinicians and GADS. Only together will we be able to move forward to improve dementia provisions for those living with this condition and their families.

565 Madam Speaker, additionally ERS, in conjunction with colleagues from St Bernard’s, have been reviewing the frailty pathway to ensure seamless multidisciplinary work and much more will be seen of this in the coming financial year. The 2024-25 financial year will see some exciting developments within ERS, including the revaluation of the care delivery model with outsourced sites, to prevent discrepancies in care provision and ensure cost-effective healthcare delivery.

570 There is a need for ongoing training and professional development programmes for both clinical and non-clinical staff to enhance staff skills and knowledge. Investing in the workforce will improve service delivery and outcomes for the organisation.

575 Finally, we will develop sound financial strategies to ensure the long-term viability of ERS, with cost-effective operations and prudent financial management. As I announced in April, ERS will be retendering for its external service provision at Hillside, John Mackintosh Wing and Bella Vista, and this process is now well under way.

580 The objectives of this exercise are to improve service delivery by holding external contractors accountable to high-quality standards whilst at the same time delivering improved value for money for the taxpayer. I am confident, therefore, that 2024-25 will see new and improved services for our community under the auspices of ERS. Elderly patients are vulnerable and have given a lot to Gibraltar. They deserve the best care, dignity and respect and we will ensure that this is the case going forward.

585 Madam Speaker, Gibraltar should be rightly proud of its healthcare services, and I am rightly proud of our healthcare system. As with every healthcare system in the world, the GHA needs to adapt and evolve to the increasing needs of the population. As we move into this next financial year, the GHA is reviewing its workforce strategy to ensure that it has the appropriate skilled workforce for the future and is engaging more fully with local schools and the University of Gibraltar to ensure a continuous stream of talent for years to come.

590 The GHA is also reviewing its financial controls and procedures to ensure that it gets the best value for money from each pound of public expenditure. Madam Speaker, if I may, I think the appointment of the Chief Secretary and the Financial Secretary on to the GHA Board will assist greatly on this front.

595 The review of our workforce is looking at workforce contracts but also tenders for external goods and services. Additionally, and importantly, we have already separated complaints from the Patient Advice and Liaison Services. This separation provides independence for anyone concerned about the quality of service that they or their loved ones have received. The first port of call for anyone with concerns continues to be the GHA’s PALS, which is now clearly signposted in the GHA, but if this then develops into a complaint, it is referred to the Complaints Department, which is independent of the GHA and overseen by my Ministry.

600 I hope this gives confidence to our service users that complaints, as and when they arise, will be dealt with quickly and transparently and action will be taken where necessary. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Alex and Daniel from my Ministry for their efforts in running the Complaints Department successfully. I am sure they are already known to many in the community.

605 As I have already stated, the 2024-25 financial year will see the strengthening of financial controls within the GHA and will build upon the substantial work undertaken in 2023-24. Highlights of this include the establishment of a finance sub-committee; the establishment of an internal audit function at the GHA, which is sat within the GHA but is entirely independent from the GHA. Phases 1 and 2 of the Theatre Inventory Transformation Project has been completed.

610 We have appointed a legal services manager to streamline claims. Divisional leads appointed in medicine, primary care, surgery, these are aimed to improve operational activities, enabling greater efficiency, leadership and enhanced patient care.

We have established an EMIS Project Board. The new CMHT project has been announced, and the GPMS removal of the clawback legislation has been amended and is to be gazetted in 2024. The list goes on, Madam Speaker.

615 Modern technology will play an increasing role in how health services are delivered for the future. With this in mind, I have specifically instructed the GHA to review how it will futureproof our services using artificial intelligence and digital technology. My objective is to present an AI/digital strategy for the GHA during 2024-25 and I am very excited about how this technology can be deployed to improve patient care services. This continued modernisation of the corporate functions of the GHA will ensure that it can continue to evolve and maintain the quality of clinical services delivered at the highest level, comparable to those delivered internationally.

620 Madam Speaker, before I turn to other areas of my ministerial portfolio, I hope that I have been able to provide an accurate snapshot of the state of the Gibraltar Health Authority at present. It is clear to us on this side of the House that the GHA continues to develop and improve its service.

625 At the heart of any healthcare system are a group of dedicated, professional and hardworking staff, and I would like to say a big thank you to each and every member of the GHA. From the Director General and the rest of the GHA executive team down, every single member of the GHA has worked flat out throughout the year to ensure that, no matter what, the GHA continues to provide the first-class standard of care expected from it. I continue to try and meet every single member of this outstanding team and to listen to the views of the GHA at every level.

630 Madam Speaker, I have no doubt that 2024-25 will continue to bring new challenges to the GHA, but I am also convinced that the GHA can rise to the challenge and continue to deliver outstanding care for all of us. I wish to take this opportunity to assure the GHA that I will continue to fight their corner, and I know that each and every individual working for the GHA is consistently looking out for patient interests in step with HMGoG's view.

635 Public Health is a portfolio which I always thought needed to go hand in hand with the Health portfolio. Our aim is always to keep people healthy and out of hospital, Madam Speaker. Incidentally, this reduces costs in the best possible way. Keeping people healthy in the first place and out of hospital reduces the spend of the GHA because people do not get ill in the first place.

640 Madam Speaker, I therefore now turn to Public Health. How healthy we are and how long we live are impacted by a range of factors. Some of these, such as our genetic makeup, we cannot change but other factors we can personally influence; for example, living a healthy lifestyle, the environment we live in, our jobs, our housing and our education. These are called the wider determinants of health or the 'cause of causes'. This is why the Public Health team have been working on developing the Covenant for Health that I will personally be leading on, with the Director of Public Health and the Director General.

645 Madam Speaker, this new Covenant for Health will be the primary prevention strategy for Gibraltar and it goes hand in hand with our Health Strategy. The Director of Public Health and her team have been developing the building blocks of this covenant over the recent months. These include the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the JSNA, tobacco and nicotine control, including vaping – more to come on that in a moment – and starting a six-step whole system approach to healthy weight, including a physical activity strategy, and breaking the intergenerational cycle of adverse childhood experiences.

655 Firstly, the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, or the JSNA. The first phase of the JSNA will be launched today. It is a website with information about various illnesses, with statistics relative to the population, and can now be found on the GHA website. This is a website which contains an enormous amount of data. It is an important aspect of the Public Health system because it starts exploring trends in the wider determinants of health.

660 This, I am advised, will help us identify what is driving and causing our ill health and what policies and interventions are needed to address these as a result. Indeed, some interventions are already contained in our manifesto; for example, the significant and systematic public awareness campaign making explicit the link between obesity and cancer and investing in weight reduction programmes and medication.

665 The JSNA will help us track and demonstrate the impacts of interventions whilst fully recognising that change at a population level often takes many years to achieve. Madam Speaker, there is no short-term quick-fix solution to this.

Secondly, tobacco and nicotine. All the evidence suggests that the greatest risk to our health remains smoking. We know that locally, upon becoming pregnant, nearly 20% of our mothers smoke and about half manage to quit during their pregnancy. The Government considers this figure is too high. Smoking not only affects a mother's health but also that of the baby in some of the most formative years of their lives.

670 Smoking is hard to quit. Nicotine is a highly addictive substance and this is why the focus over the previous year has been strengthening the GHA smoking cessation service through improving access to booking appointments, expanding the range of doctors who can prescribe nicotine replacement therapy, and advocating the message that you are far more likely to have a successful quit attempt with support.

675 Public Health, alongside the mental health team, has set up a 'coalition of the willing' to assist those who wish to quit smoking. There is a specific nurse who has set up a smoking cessation support group in Clubhouse and offers a nicotine replacement therapy.

680 Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the fantastic supports which are offered by mental health charities in Gibraltar. Whether it is Clubhouse, GibSams, Childline or the Gibraltar Mental Welfare Society, they all provide valuable support to our services. This support needs to grow and be encouraged, as will be seen with the new community mental health facility. Again, we achieve better outcomes when we work collaboratively, the GHA, Public Health and all the charities.

In 2023, 731 people were seen in the Smoking Cessation Clinic. During October, as a direct result of the 'Stoptober' campaign, 98 people were seen by the Smoking Cessation Clinic, the greatest number by month by far, indicating that people do want support and help to quit.

690 The National Focal Point for Tobacco Control that I chair as Minister for Health continues to meet and co-ordinate the strategic agenda for tobacco and nicotine control. I am pleased to report that Gibraltar was presented with an award for the work that we are undertaking on the tobacco control agenda by the UK Health Overseas Ambassador in 2023.

695 Vaping has been an issue of significant debate over the last 12 months, with many parents expressing concerns to me regarding the number of young people vaping. Whilst it is generally recognised by the scientific community as being less harmful than smoking, vaping is not harm free and the long-term effects are yet to be determined.

700 There is the perception that all young people in Gibraltar are vaping. The Public Health team undertook a survey in 2023, in partnership with the University of Gibraltar, where nearly two-thirds of the children in Years 7 to 13 responded. This represented 2,179 children, all of whom were questioned on their vaping knowledge, habits and experiences.

The majority of children have not vaped. However, as much as this may be reassuring, a third of the children had vaped at least once in their life and this increased with age.

705 Of those children who did vape, when we compared this internationally, our children vaped more than in other countries. This is why we are progressing with plans to ban the sale of vapes

to children and are working closely with the Department of Education and headteachers to try and prevent our young people starting and continuing to vape.

710 This study also identified a concerning finding that of the Year 13 pupils who responded to the survey, one in 10 had smoked cigarettes in the last month. This indicates that we still have a considerable way to go in terms of reducing lifelong impacts that smoking has upon the health of our population. These young adults will be the smoking parents of the future, affecting not only their health but through passive smoking the health of those around them. That is why I am pleased to announce that a consultation will be launched this September to explore the feasibility of developing a smoke-free generation for the future.

715 The third aspect of the Covenant for Health is supporting our population to achieve a healthy weight. Another significant risk to our health is not being a healthy weight. By this I mean being underweight, or overweight, or in the normal range for weight but not having a healthy balanced diet rich in vitamins and minerals. Being underweight can lead to osteoporosis, or brittle bones, and infertility. Being overweight leads to an increased risk of developing cancer, increased risk of
720 having a heart attack and increased risk of having type-2 diabetes.

These drivers of obesity are complex and are related to personal, environmental and societal factors. It is sadly not as simple as 'eat less and move more'. We have commenced a six-step whole system approach to healthy weight.

725 The focus during the last 12 months has been to establish our data monitoring and mapping our local drivers of obesity. I am advised that we have identified nearly 3,000 adults with type-2 diabetes in Gibraltar. This is a condition that is strongly linked to being overweight and there is now an established evidence base which finds that reducing weight can revert most people back to not being diabetic.

730 Finally, in terms of the Covenant for Health, there is a focus on children. In 2023, the Director of Public Health established a working group to address the intergenerational cycle of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs as they are otherwise known. ACEs refer to situations where children face negative experiences, such as domestic violence or parental substance abuse, that can have long-term detrimental effects.

735 These impacts not only affect individuals but also place economic burdens on services like rehabilitation. The working group has adapted the concept of ACEs for Gibraltar, mapped relevant services, and is now reviewing protective factors and exploring ways to strengthen them. These efforts align with the youth strategy for Gibraltar and initiatives by the Department of Education and the Care Agency. The intergenerational cycle of ACEs can be stopped and we are determined to do so.

740 Finally on this section, we are looking to set up a group to focus on the effects of screen time for children. We are currently scoping this out between the Director of Public Health, paediatricians and the Education Department.

I will now move on to the health protection aspects of Public Health. *(Coughing)* Not sounding very healthy over there. *(Laughter and interjections)*

745 The global health threats from infectious disease remain a risk for us all in this post-pandemic world. *(Coughing)* In most countries the threat of a future pandemic remains at the top of national risk registers. Global co-ordination of responses is undertaken through the International Health Regulations framework, or IHR.

750 The Director of Public Health continues to work in partnership with many different agencies and Government Departments to protect the health of the population. These offices include the Office of Civil Contingencies, the Environmental Agency, the GHA, the Port, the Airport and the Department of Education.

755 Additionally, Madam Speaker, we are improving and strengthening our ability to detect and manage outbreaks through our surveillance systems. The Director of Public Health launched an electronic notification system in May 2023. From May to December 2023 over 100 infectious disease notifications were submitted and managed.

760 Examples of outbreaks include the Legionnaire's disease outbreak where we identified four cases, one of which sadly passed away. We rapidly identified the outbreak through our surveillance systems and I personally chaired five strategic co-ordination group meetings to ensure that we had a robust, co-ordinated and resourced response.

765 To improve our health protection capability further, our Director of Public Health has been providing specialist public health advice into the redrafting of the 1950 Public Health Act to strengthen this to encompass an all-hazards approach, including notification of suspected chemical and radiological hazards. This will mean that we will have some of the strongest public health legislation out of any UK Overseas Territory to enable us to rapidly identify and respond to the health threats of our population.

770 Madam Speaker, vaccines do play a vital role in protecting the health of our population. We have a well-established childhood and adult immunisation programme provided by the GHA. Vaccines are monitored through the GHA Immunisation Committee, which the Director of Public Health chairs.

775 In this Committee they monitor uptake, review the evidence for developing new or amending existing programmes and review any adverse vaccine event reporting. The reason this is important is because in the early part of the year the UK reported that they were experiencing a significant measles outbreak and the World Health Organisation reported growing levels of concern regarding outbreaks across Europe and globally.

780 Although measles is often a mild disease in children, measles in adults can result in miscarriages, still births and, indeed, deaths. This is a vaccine-preventable disease and as a result our Director of Public Health developed a Gibraltar measles plan drawing upon the previous experiences from our last outbreak in 2008.

As a consequence of the move into enhanced surveillance, by offering an MMR vaccine catch-up programme we have had no confirmed cases of measles in Gibraltar. This should remind us of the importance of ensuring that we continue to achieve high levels of vaccine uptake in our population.

785 Madam Speaker, finally, I am pleased to announce that I have initiated a review of the Medical and Health Act 1997 that provides the legal framework for the functions of the Gibraltar Medical and Registration Board and the Nursing Registration Board. These boards are responsible for the registration of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, pharmacists and dentists and deals with complaints regarding their professional conduct.

790 The Health Centre workforce is evolving and new roles are being developed emphasising the importance of patient safety through robust and proportionate regulation of health professionals. The review is looking into whether this should be an independent body.

795 Madam Speaker, in summary, therefore, there are many aspects to the Public Health agenda that cover health, well-being and health protection. Working across the various Government Departments is vital for us to be able to influence and change the wider determinants of health and enable us to become one of the healthiest places in the world to raise our children.

800 I would like to thank the Director of Public Health, Dr Helen Carter, and her incredible small but hardworking team at Public Health for their great work in ensuring the protection of our population. Dr Carter is a great example of a leading woman in her speciality, whose job it is to look out for the well-being of the population. As I think I have demonstrated, Madam Speaker, the work they carry out is often quite gloomy but incredibly necessary and the Government is grateful to Dr Carter and her team for this.

805 Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Care Agency. The budget of the Care Agency is indeed £28,183,000. Forecast outturn for 2023-24 was indeed £31,420,000, but I am pleased to announce that we are looking constantly for efficiencies in the area. Efficiencies, to give concrete example to the Opposition, to the hon. Members opposite, include the allocation of children to foster carers, which is an improvement on the quality of the lives of the children who are placed into care.

810 Efficiencies include working with the Housing Department to ensure that 18-year-olds are allocated homes. Efficiencies include changing the set-up of the housing provided to individuals so that the number of carers can be rationalised, whilst always working within safe parameters and the appropriate guidelines. We are requesting that the Care Agency finds efficiencies in the way it is run. We are actively going through proposals to ensure that this is the case.

815 Learning Disability Services continues to rapidly expand in all areas. The demand is primarily transitioning students from St Martin's School to attend the centre and new admissions into residential services. The Community Learning Disability Team also remain an essential service to families who require support in the form of social work input and respite services, and there is also a steady intake of referrals and demand, resulting in full caseloads for each member of the team.

820 Madam Speaker, the House will have seen the Government's announcement last week regarding the successful tender award for the provision of domiciliary care and home support services to Lifecome Care Ltd for an accumulated amount of £3,836,573.28 based on the rates submitted and the existing requirements of the service. This decision was made through the Government Procurement Department.

825 I am very pleased that we now have a modern, contractual framework in place, ensuring that the Government, through the Care Agency, can provide better continuity of care at agreed rates, which ultimately benefits the service user. There are also clearly defined service standards included in the tender package, and therefore the contract, which will mean that the Care Agency is better able to hold the service provider to account.

830 As at the end of 2023-24, the team remains with 107 open cases which are actively being worked on. A further 50 remain on record as children in need who may need support in the future. This year has seen the addition of one full-time social worker to this team.

835 Learning Disability Services continues to strive towards excellence in services and adhere to their main aim, which is to provide person-centred support to individuals with learning disabilities, recognising and honouring their unique identities. The Care Agency's dedicated staff actively support individuals in achieving their aspirations and promoting their inclusion within the community.

840 A plan to move all learning disability services to a new purpose-built facility is in the initial stages of development. Over the next 10 years it is projected that there will be an additional 20 residents requiring housing in the Learning Disability Services centre and approximately 200 service users attending the centre.

845 As the Minister with responsibility for the Care Agency and indeed also, separately, for quality of care, I believe it is only right that we do whatever we have to do now to ensure that we future-proof the service, even if the benefits are not seen for another 10 years. They will be seen sooner, though, Madam Speaker.

845 Decisions in this area should not and are not taken for short-term political gains. They are taken for the long-term benefit of the service user.

850 Madam Speaker, referrals into Adult Services have plateaued and the number of care packages at the end of the year has slightly reduced by 11 packages, although this still remains high at 692 packages. Assessments were carried out on 486 of over-80-year-olds, which is an increase of 100 assessments within 2023-24. A total of 233 packages of care were reviewed and adjusted to meet the assessed needs of the clients.

855 The Community Social Work Team ended the year with a total of 277 open cases, 85 home support service, 84 domiciliary care and 108 social work support. 60 cases were supporting clients with mental health requirements, which is an increase of 21 from 2022-23.

855 The very successful Waterport Day Centre for the elderly accommodates 106 clients with an average daily attendance of 18 to 24 clients. There are currently 125 clients registered at the day centre, with an allocation of at least one day per week. This is another service which will be going out to tender, with a view to improving the efficiency of the service. That is in reference to the care packages, Madam Speaker. Apologies.

860 Moving on to the Care Agency's Children's Services. This service encompasses a wide range of support and interventions designed to ensure the well-being and safety of children and families. These services are typically provided by qualified and experienced social workers, who play a vital role in safeguarding children and promoting their welfare. Social workers in Children's Services are dedicated professionals who work across various teams to address the complex needs of children and families in their care.

865 Social workers within Children's Services have statutory duties under the Children Act 2009 in respect of various matters relating to children, including safeguarding, providing interventions for children in need, including those with disabilities, and providing accommodation and care for children who need this. As regulated professionals, they are bound by Care Agency policies, professional guidance and a code of ethics which uphold professional standards to ensure that we provide our targeted client group with quality care and interventions.

870 Within Children's Services, social workers operate in multidisciplinary teams, collaborating with professionals from diverse backgrounds such as education, health and the RGP. Their primary responsibility is to assess and evaluate the needs and risks faced by children, often working closely with families to develop intervention plans that address those needs. Social workers engage in direct work with children, conducting interviews, observations and assessments to gather information about their circumstances. They also provide guidance and support to families, empowering them to make positive changes and overcome challenges.

875 Through their tireless efforts, social workers strive to create a safe and nurturing environment for children, ensuring their rights and best interests are upheld. What is done within this service is truly remarkable for a very vulnerable group of children, and I want to acknowledge that here today in Parliament.

880 Madam Speaker, the Therapeutic Team provides specialised therapeutic interventions within the context of high-intensity and high-risk cases. New referrals have reduced for 2023-24 by 52 referrals, although the ongoing active cases have increased by 71 in the same period. This suggests that cases are far more complex and therefore remain open for longer.

885 Bruce's Farm is a residential facility to support clients with substance abuse or addictions. It may be beneficial to Members opposite, and indeed those watching, if I explain referral pathways to Bruce's Farm. This is a key way in which the GHA interacts with the Care Agency.

890 Individuals can self-refer to the Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services or they can be referred by a GP or any other health professional. The DARS team will carry out an assessment and then refer to the consultant psychologist, who will assess and then decide whether to detox at Ocean Views, an assessment if this is required or otherwise.

895 If a detox at Ocean Views is required, the patient goes on to a waiting list, followed by admission to Ocean Views as soon as a bed becomes available. After the detox has been completed, the patient is transferred to Bruce's Farm directly from Ocean Views.

900 If, however, a consultant psychologist decides that a detox at Ocean Views is not required, the patient is admitted directly to Bruce's Farm. Bed capacity at Bruce's Farm has increased from 13 to 16, with admissions increasing from 39 to 52 in 2023-24. Additionally, the Therapeutic Team provides support to clients in the community, and in 2023-24 they provided 624 hours of clinical support.

905 Madam Speaker, as I have said before, the Care Agency has exceeded its 2023-24 allocation, finishing at year end with an outturn position of £31 million. This is against an allocation of £19.8 million, an overspend of £11.2 million. The most significant variance against this budget was £9.8 million, which relates to relief cover of £13.8 million for the year against a budget of £4 million.

910 We have asked the Care Agency to look into this and rationalise this particular service so that this does not happen again this year. Relief cover accounts for circa 45% of the overall expenditure of the Care Agency and is something the Government has increased exponentially, much to the benefit of the most vulnerable in our community.

We are, however, looking at ways to control the expenditure without affecting the service. I think that is the key here. We need to control and keep an eye on that expenditure without affecting the service. We believe, with the advice of the Care Agency, that that is something that it is possible to do.

915 Madam Speaker, let me be clear. In 2011-12 the domiciliary care budget was £750,000. In the financial year 2024-25 we have allocated £3.5 million to this Head alone, now called Home Support – Supported Living in the Community. These figures, however, show the level of investment which we are willing to make in these services and as all Members of this House will know, these services are vital for the community. These figures are incomparable to what they
920 were in 2011.

Madam Speaker, the Care Agency held their annual award ceremony earlier this year, which I was delighted to attend, alongside my colleagues the Minister for Equality and the Minister for Justice. This event recognised the dedication, commitment and professionalism of the staff who constantly go above and beyond in carrying out their duties. Thirteen individuals were presented
925 with awards and one team award was awarded.

Additionally, I am particularly proud of this, Madam Speaker. At the Excellence and Innovation Awards ceremony hosted by the Chief Secretary, the Care Agency's Tank Ramp – Dry House Project also came runner-up in the Project Achievement Award, which recognises a Department which has successfully executed an innovative project.

930 On behalf of the Government and I am sure all sides of the House, I wish to extend our heartfelt thanks to the CEO of the Care Agency, Carlos Banderas, and all of the very passionate Heads of Service – Giselle, Julie, Jennifer, Rachel and Monique – as well as all of their dedicated teams, for their extraordinary work throughout the year in supporting the most vulnerable members of our society. Their efforts frequently go unnoticed, but today I want to recognise the hard work and
935 dedication the staff put in 365 days a year.

Madam Speaker, you will be glad to know that I now move away from the Health and Social Care portfolio into something rather different: town planning.

The Town Planning Department continues to have a high volume of applications, with almost 500 applications received during 2023. In the last year, the Department has successfully filled a
940 number of vacant professional posts in both the town planning and the building control sections. I am pleased to report that within the next few months it is expected that the Department will have its full complement of professional staff. When I say 'in the next few months' this is solely because recruitment is taking place.

The nature of applications to Town Planning is variable and includes household developments,
945 extensions to buildings, internal works, as well as major developments. Major developments dealt with in the last year include the Bayside One residential project, the National Stadium, the redevelopment of the old Bayside and St Anne's Schools, various development proposals along Devil's Tower Road, the new theatre at John Mackintosh Hall, the proposed new college and the residential development to the rear of the Cross of Sacrifice, a new hotel on the site of Marina Bay
950 car park, and the first phase of land reclamation at the Eastside.

The Development and Planning Commission continues to meet on a regular basis, with a total of 11 meetings held in 2023. The DPC meetings are open and transparent and continue to be held remotely and live-streamed on the Government's YouTube channel, ensuring that the DPC proceedings are easily accessible to the general public. We will continue to keep under review
955 the arrangements for DPC meetings to ensure that the planning process remains open and transparent.

Madam Speaker, as the House will know, the Government recently announced the successful tender award of the Gibraltar Development Plan. The tender was awarded to Nathaniel Lichfield & Partners Ltd following a competitive tender process conducted via the Government's
960 Procurement Department. The tender award will mean that the existing 2009 Development Plan can now be evaluated with a new plan, reflecting a more modern Gibraltar.

965 This is hugely important and will go a long way in ensuring that we preserve Gibraltar's natural appeal whilst also protecting our economic interests. Our aim is to ensure sustainable growth *and* economic development. I would like to thank all the officials involved in the procurement process for their work and look forward to receiving a first draft of the new Development Plan as soon as practicably possible.

I should add in the interests of full transparency that the tender was awarded for an amount of £634,973.25. And I am advised that the new Development Plan should be completed within a period of 24 months.

970 Madam Speaker, unfortunately the e-Planning service that allows the submission of applications online had to be taken offline due to certain security vulnerabilities. Implementation of a temporary interim solution was delayed, but I am pleased to report that the new temporary portal for applications went live on Monday, 10th June 2024.

975 Work had already started on developing a permanent replacement for the existing portal and this work continues. In the meantime, the Department continues to work on its rolling programme of updates and improvements to the back-end of the e-Planning system and to improve its functionality further.

The Department is currently engaged in a process to evaluate the existing Building Regulations and multiple building codes to align them with the most recent standards. This involves revising all 11 remaining parts to adhere to UK and European standards.

Madam Speaker, this will empower Building Control personnel to uphold standards, achieve best practices and guarantee the health and safety of both occupants and users of the built environment. At the same time, there is a review of the pertinent sections of the Public Health Act under way to establish Gibraltar's inaugural Building Act.

985 The Government contracted an expert external consultant to develop a Seismic and Wind National Annex for Gibraltar, which has now been drafted and is currently being reviewed before finalising. Once the review has been completed, the annex will be incorporated into the Building Regulations to form part of the legal framework for Gibraltar building design codes. This will ensure that Gibraltar's buildings are constructed to internationally recognised standards for earthquake and wind loading.

990 Madam Speaker, we are exploring the possibility of establishing the Considerate Contractor scheme in Gibraltar modelled on that which currently exists in the United Kingdom. The Considerate Contractor scheme is a hugely successful scheme in the UK which determines how large-scale contractors can build with minimum nuisance to their surroundings. This will, in my view, greatly assist the public in terms of minimising the disruption caused by construction.

The Government is committed to ensuring that we have an open and transparent planning system that is rigorous, efficient and effective, and that buildings are constructed to the highest standards. I would like to thank the Town Planner, Mr Paul Naughton-Rumbo and his team for work on this front.

1000 Madam Speaker, I turn now to Gibraltar Maritime Services. Before going into some detail on the work done by both the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Gibraltar Maritime Administration respectively, I wanted to take a moment to speak about how we would improve the maritime product in Gibraltar going forward.

1005 The synergies between these two entities are, in my view, crucial to ensuring the Gibraltar Port and the broader maritime sector's success and growth. We are, therefore, frequently marketing both the Gibraltar Port and the Gibraltar Maritime Authority under the same banner.

Both the Gibraltar Port Authority and the Gibraltar Maritime Administration are committed to maintaining and enhancing Gibraltar's status as a global maritime hub; and as a result, through their joint efforts, they will continue to drive forward the success of Gibraltar's maritime sector, ensuring that it remains an important and integral part of Gibraltar PLC's overall economic and strategic framework.

1010 Madam Speaker, in order to facilitate this joint approach, I will be convening the Gibraltar Maritime Strategy Council every month to work on and develop the strategic aims and outcomes

1015 which will form part of the Gibraltar Maritime Strategy. These meetings will take place in my
Ministry and will be chaired by me as Minister with responsibility for Maritime Services. By taking
an active role in these discussions, I aim to ensure that our Maritime Strategy is comprehensive,
forward thinking, and aligned with both local and global maritime developments.

1020 The council will focus on addressing current challenges, exploring new opportunities and
setting actionable goals to enhance Gibraltar's position as a leading maritime hub and global
centre of excellence. It will also co-ordinate the maritime efforts of the Port and the Maritime
Administration.

1025 This collaborative approach will ensure that Gibraltar continues to be an attractive place to do
business and will, in my view, not only contribute significantly to trade but, importantly, also to
our economy. We need to ensure that we future-proof our Port and we do not and will not rest in
our efforts to attract further business and other maritime services to Gibraltar. We will do this by
continuing with our marketing strategy of direct engagement and face-to-face marketing with
clients and potential partners, as well as through new and innovative ways which I have no doubt
will be discussed at the Gibraltar Maritime Strategy Council.

1030 Madam Speaker, 2023 saw a number of events held under the umbrella of Gibraltar Maritime
Services, including attendance at the International Bunker Industry Association annual dinner,
held in London, which saw attendance by some of the key players in the bunkering and maritime
industry in Gibraltar.

1035 One notable event was the London International Shipping Week, held in September 2023,
which holds a distinguished reputation as an international shipping event, providing invaluable
networking opportunities for leaders across various sectors of the international shipping
community, including regulators, charterers, finance institutions and ship owners.

1040 This event attracted guests such as the UK Secretary of State for Shipping, the IMO General
Secretary and a very high calibre of leaders in their industry and provided an exceptional platform
in which to talk about the Gibraltar Port and its potential. Many of the Port's key players also
attended what we plan to be the first of several marketing events using this model, in order to
keep Gibraltar at the forefront of minds in the maritime world.

1045 Additionally, the third Gibraltar Maritime Week took place in June. This was, Madam Speaker,
yet another successful locally-held event that attracted international participants from Singapore,
Maldives, Malta and other maritime jurisdictions.

1050 Maritime Week serves as the perfect platform for us to recognise the contributions made by
the maritime industry to our local economy and the global trade network. We are committed to
hosting further similar events in the future as we, on this side of the House, believe it is very
important to get people to Gibraltar to appreciate the unique geographical and geopolitical
advantages that Gibraltar offers. There is definitely no better way to do that than by bringing them
to Gibraltar to see for themselves.

1055 In January of this year the Gibraltar Maritime Services attended a reception at the Yacht Club
of Greece, hosted by HM Government of Gibraltar, where stakeholders from Gibraltar's maritime
industry connected with the Greek maritime community. Given Greece's significant presence in
global shipping, commanding 21% of global tonnage, Gibraltar Maritime Services are optimistic
about attracting interest from this strategic sector.

To this end, Madam Speaker, Gibraltar Maritime Services once again hosted the Gibraltar stand
at Posidonia 2024. This was held in Athens this June. This event remains one of the most
anticipated and prestigious maritime events globally and the Gibraltar stand is always a popular
stop for those interested in finding out more about the local maritime industry.

1060 I was delighted to attend Posidonia this year as its Minister for the Port and the Maritime
Administration. It was clear to me, purely based on the interest we had at the Gibraltar stand, and
the number of companies wanting to find out more information about Gibraltar and its Port, that
Gibraltar remains a global centre of excellence.

1065 Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our sponsors and partners
involved in these events. The reality is that without their support, both commercially and

financially, it would be virtually impossible to promote the Gibraltar Port at the level that we do. So, thank you.

1070 Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Port itself, and 2023 saw a number of events which impacted the Port of Gibraltar in one way or another. These include the removal of the OS 35 in July which took a lot of effort and impacted on the resources of the port up until the time of its removal; the ongoing impact of Russian sanctions on ships not being allowed to call at Gibraltar; the disruption to port operations due to several bouts of bad weather during the course of the year; and the general slow recovery of the maritime sector from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as other global maritime events, including incidents which have led to dramatically reduced traffic through the

1075 Suez Canal.

But the resilience of the Port of Gibraltar to adapt to these challenges has allowed the Port Authority to once again perform above expectations, both in activity in some of the sectors and also financially. All of this, Madam Speaker, despite the geo-political tensions affecting global trade.

1080 Madam Speaker, the continuing seesaw effect in port activity seen in 2022 has continued throughout 2023, into the early part of 2024 in different sectors of the Port. This can be seen in the figure for overall vessel calls to British Gibraltar Territorial Waters, where we saw an increase of 0.7% in all calls in 2023 against 2022. But for the first quarter of 2024 we have seen a small drop of 1.53% against 2023 figures, largely in part to port operations being suspended due to bad

1085 weather. However, we expect to see a swing back into positive territory in the second quarter of 2024.

Madam Speaker, bunkering activity – the mainstay of port activity – saw an increase in bunker calls of just under 4% in 2023 against the 2022 figures, and we continue to see upward trends in the number of bunker calls in the first quarter of 2024.

1090 Madam Speaker, Gibraltar is one of the very few ports worldwide that can offer both conventional fuels as well as LNG and biofuel deliveries to any vessels opting to take up these currently viable fuels. Along with industry, we are consistently looking at ways and initiatives to make the Port greener. As a result, Gibraltar remains an attractive port for bunkering and we see continued interest both from the vessel operators calling at our Port, as well as from prospective port operators seeking to set up in our Port and offer their services to this trade.

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Madam Speaker, LNG bunkering is also growing with an additional LNG bunker being granted during 2023 and growth in calls and volumes are picking up exponentially. To quantify, we already saw that the total number of supplies carried out in 2023 have been exceeded in 2024, and this also applies to the quantities of LNG supplied as a whole.

1100 Gibraltar's support and positioning to offer this service shows the Government's progress in supporting the transition of the maritime industry towards greener fuels. This further reinforces the importance in this field.

Madam Speaker, we continue to work with the industry to make sure we are ready to support the maritime sector when new fuel solutions achieve the level of maturity required for their uptake as mainstream fuels for the maritime industry and is also part of the Government's effort to support greater sustainability in shipping in the Port.

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Yacht visits to Gibraltar saw an improvement of some 6% overall in 2023 against 2022 figures, and we anticipate that this positive trend will continue through 2024, given Gibraltar Port's reputation as a reliable port to call, especially for crew changes, supplies and other important services.

1110

Madam Speaker, it is well documented that the cruise industry continues to recover from the challenges of the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, and repositioning decisions, changes to itineraries and stiff competition from regional ports who continue in their efforts to attract cruise companies to call at their ports, are an added challenge.

1115 This is one of the many areas with which I have the pleasure of working closely with my friend, the Minister for Tourism, and I must say he is doing a magnificent job in promoting Gibraltar

abroad to cruise liner companies. I will therefore leave it to him entirely to go through the cruise figures.

1120 Additionally, Madam Speaker, we are working on a Port Master Plan to identify how best to support the local industry within the constraints of the limited space available in the Gibraltar Port, so that we are in the best possible position to support the maritime industry. This ties into the plans for the new cruise liner terminal. A key aspect of this initiative consists of drawing in the stakeholders and taking their views and needs into account as we plan the future of the Port.

1125 I now turn to the Authority's finances. As I mentioned earlier, the Authority continues to perform well. As at the end of financial year a total of £9,068,997 in revenue had been received.

The estimated revenue figure for the financial year 2023-24 was £8,274,000. A late payment of an invoice of £500,000 was received in this financial year, which should have been paid in the previous financial year, and we also received an additional new licence fee of £250,000 which did not factor into our original estimate submission.

1130 Expenditure was £6,883,168 against a budget of £6,807,000 for the full period. The increase of £51,308 was as a result of an insurance policy renewal fee which was higher than anticipated at the time of the estimate submission.

1135 Madam Speaker, a review of Port tariffs is ongoing with some minor adjustments already being implemented, namely, to tug operator licence tariffs, the LNG bunkering levy and a green incentive scheme discount. Further adjustments to Port tariffs will be considered where necessary, in consultation with stakeholders, to ensure a fair and reasonable approach is taken.

Madam Speaker, in 2023 it was reported that the refurbishment and repairs of Watergardens Marina would commence. I am pleased to confirm that this project has now been completed although some additional extras have been requested.

1140 The Gibraltar Port Authority have a number of initiatives and small projects under way in order to improve services, and in turn improve Port activity as a whole. I hope to be able to report on these as they evolve in the coming months. To this end, our communication and engagement with the local maritime community is a fundamental factor in this process.

1145 Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the magnificent and extraordinarily hard-working Captain of the Port, Mr John Ghio and his team at the Gibraltar Port Authority for their efforts throughout the year.

1150 I turn now, Madam Speaker, to the Gibraltar Maritime Administration, the GMA. The GMA's reputation for having a robust legal framework, efficient registration processes and a commitment to safety and quality standards, continues to attract interest from ship owners globally. Although it is true to say that the pace of new registrations remains sluggish, we are encouraged by recent expressions of interest, some of which have resulted in several new vessels registering in the last few months.

1155 The registered yacht fleet remain stable, showing no significant changes in number. Similarly, the Small Ship Register demonstrates consistent growth in line with recent trends. As of 1st May, the fleet size consists of 130 ships, 860 yachts and 373 small ships. Part of the efforts of the Gibraltar Maritime Council will be to look at ways to grow this.

1160 Our register remains White-Listed within the Paris Memorandum of Understanding on port state control. The Paris MoU White List represents quality flags with a consistently low detention record. The GMA's ongoing vision is to uphold and enhance the reputation of its register by promoting a large and diverse fleet without compromising quality and continues to work towards trying to reach pre-Brexit and pre-pandemic levels in terms of fleet size and revenue.

The Maritime Academy in the University is also doing very well and is attracting vessels to Gibraltar. I will let the Hon. Minister with responsibility for the University deal with this in its entirety.

1165 Madam Speaker, the GMA remains dedicated to improving and enhancing its e-services. The Administration's Seafarers' Division continues to issue a significant number of provisional and full-term flag-state endorsements. The GMA's efforts in promoting its ship and yacht register abroad continued during 2023 to date.

1170 Throughout the relevant period the GMA's survey division has also continued to provide ongoing support to its global fleet 24/7, 365 days a year through its emergency response service for safety and security matters. The GMA continues to work closely with the UK Department for Transport and other UK government agencies in the provision of this important service.

1175 Domestically, the GMA maintains its commitment to offering technical assistance and support to the Gibraltar Port Authority as well as various other Government Departments, authorities and agencies. The GMA, in its role as Port State Authority, was part of the multi-agency team that investigated and brought about the successful prosecution case brought against the Master of the *Gas Venus* following the oil spill that took place in the Bay of Gibraltar in August 2023 during a bunkering operation.

1180 The GMA remains integral to the Gibraltar maritime cluster, serving as a facilitator of international trade and commerce by providing a maritime register committed to the highest standards of safe ship operation, protection of the marine environment and the welfare of those working on board. In partnership with local stakeholders, the GMA is committed to further promoting its high-quality service and the many benefits its register and Gibraltar as a maritime jurisdiction provide to ship owners and the broader international shipping industry.

1185 I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Maritime Administrator, Mr Dylan Cocklan and his team for their work, in particularly in ensuring Gibraltar and its port remain in the mind of industry players.

1190 Madam Speaker, I turn now to the first of the public utilities that fall under my ministerial portfolio; the Gibraltar Electricity Authority or the GEA. Work continues at North Mole Power Station to further improve the performance of the installation in terms of output, reliability and emissions. On emissions, our CO² emissions again decreased by just over 3% from 118,669 tonnes in 2022 to 115,445 tonnes in 2023.

1195 Madam Speaker, it should not be lost on the House, and in particular to Members opposite, that in 2016 – prior to LNG being used in Gibraltar as our primary fuel for power generation – CO² emissions stood at 161,358 tonnes. That is to say, our CO² emissions, caused as a result of power generation, have dropped by almost 30% since then and this will continue to be the trend.

The Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) will be operational in just over 13 months. In fact, the contract between HMGoG and the provider was signed in my office on 14th May 2024.

1200 This exciting new project will pave the way for the removal of our existing temporary power generating sets at North Mole, whilst at the same time provide non-polluting power grid resilience as it will be used primarily as a 'spinning reserve' and will reduce power outages which might be derived from mechanical and/or electrical issues at our main power station. The commissioning of the BESS will also contribute towards a further reduction of our carbon footprint.

1205 Although events around the world continue to impact on fuel costs, in particular gas prices, the price the Gibraltar Electricity Authority pays for its LNG is locked into a pricing mechanism which provides shelter despite the volatility of fuel markets, resulting in significant savings when compared with natural gas spot market prices. Notwithstanding this, it is important to note that the average consumer in Gibraltar only covers 50% of their actual consumption, with the Government subsidising the remaining half. This practice sets Gibraltar apart from other regions around the world.

1210 Madam Speaker, on the renewable energy front, more land should become available shortly for the development of further solar initiatives. This will provide a significant boost to the total installed solar capacity in Gibraltar and contribute significantly towards achieving our green energy targets. We are working to deliver this project in this financial year.

1215 Improvements to the public lighting network continue to replace our existing street-lighting with LED and/or low energy lanterns, thus further reducing overall consumption. Works are ongoing behind the scenes to provide the full required power capacity that is envisaged for the Eastside Project in years to come. High voltage cables totalling about 12 km in length are already being laid between a newly constructed high voltage distribution centre to the new Waterport
1220 Distribution Centre.

Madam Speaker, in the financial year 2023-24, £2,382,320.82 was invested into our network. This includes new substations, upgrades to existing substations, high voltage and low voltage cabling, as well as expenditure on road infrastructure. Additionally, the availability of shore power to supply vessels calling in Gibraltar is progressing well.

1225 The GEA, together with the Gibraltar Port Authority, will soon commission infrastructure and systems at the Extension Jetty that will allow vessels which are usually or temporarily berthed alongside to have access to shore power. Again, jointly with the GPA, systems are being considered that will allow cruise ships to connect to shore power when visiting Gibraltar, a possibility that can only be seriously considered following the commissioning of the North Mole
1230 Power Station and its inherent surplus capacity whilst using clean fuel. I recently visited Malta with the Captain of the Port and the CEO of GibElec to explore these options further.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the CEO of GibElec, Michael Caetano and the rest of his magnificent team who work flat out throughout the year to ensure, insofar as humanely possible, that our lights are on 24/7, 365 days a year.

1235 We have committed to a Health and Safety review, further to issues recently raised by the workforce as well as looking at a workforce review again, as requested by the workforce. Finally, a new course for apprentices is due to start this September under the apprenticeship schemes to be provided by the Hon. Minister Santos.

Madam Speaker, I turn now to the second of the Public Utilities I am responsible for: AquaGib.
1240 During the last financial year AquaGib has spent approximately £15 million in order to maintain and improve the provision of potable and seawater supply and sewerage services available in Gibraltar. This expenditure, Madam Speaker, also includes an investment of £1.2 million on asset maintenance projects, which included funds from the financial year ending March 2023 that were unable to be spent due to the fire at Powers Drive.

1245 Madam Speaker, AquaGib have been working on a number of major projects, which include the replacement of potable and seawater mains where significant at the following locations: Red Sands Road, Devil's Tower Road, Hospital Ramp and Engineers Road. They have been involved in the cleaning and maintenance of the service reservoirs at Governor's Cottage, the reverse osmosis remineralisation system renewal, and the replacement of customers' water meters, meter cupboards and meter manifolds.
1250

Madam Speaker, following the fire at Power's Drive in July 2022, AquaGib has completed the repairs to its damaged asset inside the tunnel, including improvements to the location of the saltwater supply pipe which will, importantly, provide additional resilience to this asset for the future.

1255 Works to remove the temporary diversion pipework has also been completed in this financial year, including burial of part of the pipework to provide additional resilience as an alternative supply route for the future. These works were completed in August 2023.

Madam Speaker, AquaGib continues to work with its insurers to finalise the totality of the claim relating to the Power's Drive fire, with partial payments of £900,000 being received so far in
1260 relation to the costs incurred. It is expected that the insurance claim will be finalised before the end of March 2025.

AquaGib's expenditure for the following financial year is estimated at £15.6 million in order to maintain and improve the provision of potable and seawater supply and sewerage services in Gibraltar. In addition to this, AquaGib will continue to work with HMGoG on the delivery of new
1265 projects, including the development of a new AquaGib site to relocate water production and other AquaGib facilities on North Mole, and the completion of the new infrastructure for potable and saltwater delivery from the Waterworks reservoirs to the entrance of the new Eastside development area.

I am looking at several issues raised by the workforce and remain committed to resolving these
1270 issues in a practical and conciliatory manner. I am cognisant that I have to revert on some of the outstanding issues in the next couple of weeks.

Once again, Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Paul Singleton and his team at AquaGib for the work they do on a daily basis.

1275 Madam Speaker, I turn now to the Government's Procurement Department, another portfolio for which I have ministerial responsibility. The Procurement Department is the beating heart of Government equity. It is the Department which ensures the award of all large projects go to the most efficient solution. Importantly, Madam Speaker, it is not always about cost. It is about the provision of great service, efficiency and cost.

1280 The Procurement Office is currently responsible for the on-demand value-for-money sourcing of goods, services and works through tenders and requests for quotes, adhering to the legal and policy thresholds outlined in the various procurement regulations and the HMGoG's Purchasing and Procurement Policy for Government Departments.

1285 The Department's work over the past year has included the following: provision of the respite services for the Care Agency; provision of domiciliary care and home support for the Care Agency; insurance for the Care Agency; provision of care and facilities management services for Elderly Residential Services at Hillsides, Bella Vista and John Mackintosh Home; tender for the provision of IVF to the Gibraltar Health Authority; and numerous others which I will not go into. These are just a few examples of the numerous projects the office handles.

1290 In addition to these tasks, the Procurement Office is also involved in managing cross-organisation contracts; maintaining the Government's e-Procurement system; and providing help-desk functions to both public service and private-sector users; monitoring purchasing practices within Departments; and managing the Government's preferred suppliers, etc.

1295 Additionally, Madam Speaker, the Procurement Office has been assisting the Chief Secretary with investigations stemming from the Principal Auditor's report, reviewing procedures to enhance efficiency, transparency and effectiveness in public sourcing, and revising the procurement regulations which are set to be amended in the coming months. This office keeps us all in check.

1300 They have been working with consultants to launch a new website and they have been training the Gibraltar Health Authority's Procurement staff in the use of the Government's e-Procurement system and processes governed by the Procurement Regulations. This ensures a standardised approach to sourcing that is easily accessible to businesses.

In the coming months, the Procurement Office will be working closely with the Digital Services' Purchase to Pay team to deliver further improvements. When I say, Madam Speaker, that the breadth of the portfolio shows exactly how Government works, this is a perfect example.

1305 They will also work with the Department of Personnel and Development – formerly known as the Government's Human Resources Department – to provide additional training to Departments. Furthermore, they will partner with the Ministry for Equality to explore how social considerations can be incorporated into the Government tenders process, building on their current existing work with environmental considerations.

1310 Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Jordan Borg and the staff at the Procurement Department for their diligent work throughout the year in what is a crucially important area of Government business.

1315 You will be glad to know, Madam Speaker, that I am on my last portfolio. I have left Business to the last because it is a ministry with huge potential for Gibraltar going forward. As will be known, we have recently appointed a new CEO for Business.

Business makes a huge socioeconomic contribution to Gibraltar. Our Government fully values this contribution, not just in economic terms through tax receipts and job creation, but also in terms of the wide selection of goods and services that businesses provide to our community.

1320 This positive interaction between business and its customers underpins Gibraltar's success and prosperity as one of the world's smallest but well-diversified economies. Twelve years ago I was fortunate enough to be appointed as Chairwoman of one of Gibraltar's business representative groups, a position that I proudly held for six years. I was privileged to have been involved with that organisation since the Mari-Lou Guerrero era.

1325 This was a formative experience, not only teaching me first-hand about the real issues that our local businesses face, but also about their resilience and their drive to succeed. Above all, that is what makes me want to help them. It has also taught me a lot about Gibraltar and the way that it works, which is exactly what Mari-Lou told me that it would do.

1330 I recently had the opportunity to look back at one of my first interviews as Chairwoman, and I was reminded that the inspiration I had back then is what continues to drive me today: my enjoyment of working *with* Gibraltarians, *for* Gibraltarians. There is a wider benefit to Gibraltar PLC that serves us all, Government included.

1335 So against that backdrop, I am embarking on a new strategy for Business. The business community has been calling for this and we have listened. As I deliver this Budget speech, we are publishing a strategic plan that sets out how we intend to achieve the four strategic goals that we have set for the next three years.

Of course, this plan will be a work in progress that we will continually improve and mould to changing circumstances. We need the business community's participation to make it succeed. If we work together, we can get the job done.

1340 For now, our strategic plan plants the first seeds for transitioning the Office of Fair Trading towards a wider business remit, bringing together the OFT and several other Government-led functions like business registration, and soon to be employment and other business-focused initiatives.

1345 Some of our initiatives are already under way, such as the Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme loans, which I will touch on later. We will rely on initiatives like these to shape and achieve our strategic goals. At the core of our strategy, Madam Speaker, is to make business easy. Easy for new businesses and also easy for existing businesses.

Every minute spent away from Government red tape is another minute that that business can invest in growing and thriving. We have everything within our power to make this happen. The ultimate aim is for the ease of doing business in Gibraltar to become an attraction in its own right.

1350 By the time I leave this portfolio, businesses will hopefully see a significant improvement in business interactions with Government. Over time, and working in conjunction with the wider Government, ease of business can be the flywheel to achieving our long-term ambitions. We want to make business easy by tearing down red tape and improving co-ordination between Departments. We have started by rolling out a temporary application form for new business licence applications.

1355 I recently announced at the GFSB annual dinner that business registration will be transferred from the Department of Employment to Business. For the first time we will see a joined-up approach between business licensing and business registration. But rest assured, this is just the beginning.

1360 Changes are being made to the e-Gov platform so that it works better for business users and for our Departments. This is being done as we consolidate and simplify our legislation and the processes contained therein. Advanced plans are already under way for improving entertainment licensing, leisure areas and tables and chairs regimes.

1365 Madam Speaker, unfortunately, all of these goals go slower than we would like to see them, but they are in the throes of being done. Our goal is to create a seamless experience for businesses to engage with Government; or as I put it at the GFSB dinner, for the setting up and running of your business to be as smooth and simple as the technology in your pocket.

We anticipate seeing the fruit of this work within the next year. But there are also other initiatives that we are working on now to make business easier and less cumbersome.

1370 In March this year, we launched a public consultation on the audit threshold for businesses. We are grateful to all the individuals and businesses that gave feedback. The audit threshold has not generally kept up with inflation.

Having considered this feedback with my Cabinet colleague, the Hon. Nigel Feetham, who has ministerial responsibility for Taxation, we have decided jointly to raise the audit threshold to

1375 £1.75 million. We will monitor the impact of this increase as there may be scope for a further increase in the future.

Along with that, the consultation also brought up suggestions relating to the individuals who can sign compilation reports. We do believe that this needs to be looked at. We will be exploring this further with the Tax Office and if necessary with the FSC. We are also considering a number
1380 of other suggestions that were put forward by consultees.

Beyond improving ease of doing business, I also want to demonstrate visible enforcement. This is the second strategic goal set out in our plan. Enforcement is the key to ensuring businesses compete on a level playing field. If that enforcement is visible, it will serve as a catalyst for non-compliant businesses to become compliant. But enforcement cannot happen in isolation, it needs
1385 to be preceded by a multi-pronged awareness campaign, and we want to roll that out in a way that is efficient and informative. We must improve the quality of our product by ensuring our laws are fully complied with by everyone.

The third key goal within our strategic plan is to improve communication. The publication of our strategic plan is a first step in that direction. I am grateful to the business representative groups that have kindly reviewed our strategic plan with us: the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses, the Main Street Consultative Board and the Business
1390 Advisory Board, and their underlying associations.

Thank you. Our relationship with each of these groups remains as important as ever. Our communication with them provides us with crucial feedback that goes right to the very heart of
1395 our Parliament. And I am very pleased to report to this House that we have gladly incorporated the suggestions and improvements that they have put forward.

But we also want to push a culture change that sees us become more pro-active in our communication with businesses. Our communication occurs at different levels beyond our excellent engagement with these business representative groups.

To the interactions that we have with regulated businesses and their consumers, we intend to put these interactions on to a more modern and interactive footing. We want our communication to have value. So, as part of improving our communication, we have also published a report with some of the OFT's highlights of the past year.

It has been almost 10 years since the OFT was established and in that time it has made steady
1405 progress. But as with any project of this nature, there are always areas we can look to improve. The annual publication of this report will provide an important overview of the business landscape in Gibraltar.

The 30 real estate agents that are regulated by the OFT have transacted over £300,000,000 between them in the past year. And I am pleased to report that their compliance standards of anti-money laundering have improved significantly. The real estate sector has played an important
1410 part in our White-Listing. Together with the Anti-Money Laundering Team at the OFT, they deserve all the credit for their hard work.

The Consumer Protection Team have also dealt with over 400 consumer complaints, leading to almost 60 investigations and 90 trader inspections in the past year.

1415 Whilst navigating the transition to the new Fair Trading Act 2023, the Business Licensing Team have issued 700 new business licence applications. That brings the total number of active business licences in issue to 3,000. Business is evidently on the up.

That brings me to the last of the strategic goals within our plan: business development. Business is the driving force of Gibraltar's economy. With my legal background and current
1420 portfolio, I see the synergies between the financial sectors, tourism and the Port.

All of these sectors also interact with business in one way or another. In real economic terms, businesses falling outside these traditional labels also make up an invaluable contribution to our GDP.

As I mentioned earlier, their importance is amplified as we, as a community, are their main
1425 customers. Recognising their value, we want to build a strategy that supports and grows their contribution by promoting business.

Business, as a sector, needs attention. It deserves attention. We want to bring new, high-quality businesses to Gibraltar. We will seek to identify target sectors and markets where we see the potential for sustainable and diversified growth.

1430 We need jobs in sectors that attract our highly qualified students. We need to have an outlet for the extremely creative and talented people that Gibraltar possesses. We want to encourage them to return to Gibraltar to service an international clientele as well as our domestic one.

1435 In today's day and age, the world can be their oyster. We will therefore establish delivery bodies so that we can grow the sectors that best fit our long-term plans, identify their target markets outside Gibraltar and support them as a Government.

In order to encourage our young entrepreneurs, I am today announcing a waiver of business licensing fees for applicants aged 21 and under. I am also pleased to announce to this House that we have recently opened a new round of applications to the Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme.

1440 This scheme was launched to facilitate loans from participating banks to start-up businesses. Further details can be obtained on our press release, or by emailing GibraltarEnterpriseScheme@gibraltar.gov.gi. We have also put in place a phased plan for our One Stop Shop and I expect this to be rolled out in coming months.

1445 We hope our strategic plan provides the business community with our vision on how we intend to help them stay ahead in an increasingly competitive and globalised environment. We face a pivotal time with the treaty. We are on the cusp of a shift in the economic opportunities that lie before us.

1450 Gibraltar's businesses have historically succeeded in the face of changing and challenging circumstances. Our Government is here to facilitate any transition to a treaty-based economy, so that we can generate maximum prosperity from the opportunities that will come with it. But we need to be ready in either scenario, be that facilitating the economic prosperity that comes with a treaty, or surviving and thriving without one.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our newly appointed CEO of Business and the OFT, Mr John Paul Fa, as well as the wider OFT team for their great work throughout the year.

1455 I will also take this opportunity, Madam Speaker, to state that the Members on *this* side of the House intend to focus and work together to carry out the jobs that we were voted in for. Myself, and all my colleagues on this side of the House are committed to working together to improve the business environment in Gibraltar. There are no *Hunger Games* going on over here. However much Members opposite might want to see us fighting each other, that is simply not our style.

1460 Winter is not coming. Summer is here. We will leave the *Game of Thrones* to the hon. Members opposite. We will double down and focus on the prosperity of Gibraltar.

1465 My job, and indeed *our* job, is to bring in business, be they regulated business through the Financial Services portfolio, or unregulated business through my own portfolio to increase the prosperity of Gibraltarians. From my own perspective, I can assure Members opposite, that no matter the goading that we are subjected to, our focus will be to work *together* to ensure that Gibraltar business is as attractive a proposition as possible. That is what we were voted in to do, Madam Speaker, and that is indeed what we shall deliver.

1470 Madam Speaker, given the number of ministerial portfolios for which I am responsible, and indeed the size and money appropriated to them, it is just not possible to set out every single area of work in each of those areas. Thankfully, I think, in this instance.

We have done a lot in these past nine months together and I could not have done even a fraction of that work without my team, who deserve all the credit for the things that get done right and on time. Every single day I am amazed by the great work done by the many public servants that I have had the pleasure of meeting since October last year.

1475 Madam Speaker, they constantly work behind the scenes quietly and efficiently, without seeking any recognition. Far too often our public servants are criticised but, Madam Speaker, I can tell you, as someone who comes from the private sector, that the work our public servants put in for the benefit of us all is, frankly, remarkable.

1480 Madam Speaker, I would not be able to do this alone. My small but quite incredible team at my Ministry are the engine that allows me to work; often at fifth gear. But I must say, despite being a very small team, the engine is well oiled and without them the transition and getting on to the numerous portfolios would have been impossible. I want to thank each and every one of them and I want them to know how grateful I am to them for their diligence; often at all hours of the day.

1485 Adrianna, Edwina, Aaron, Annie and Stephen. Thank you. Thank you for your support from the very first day that you came onboard.

Madam Speaker, I would also like to thank you, Mr Clerk and the rest of the Parliament team for their assistance throughout the year and for making us new entrants to the Parliament feel so welcomed.

1490 Madam Speaker, for these reasons I, too, commend the Bill to the House. *[Banging on desks]*.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, after that two-hour tour de force I wonder whether the House might recess for 15 minutes before we continue?

Madam Speaker: Yes, the House will recess for 15 minutes.

The House recessed at 12.08 p.m. and resumed at 12.25 p.m.

The Appropriation Act 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

1495 **Madam Speaker:** Yes, the Hon. J Ladislaus, who I am glad to hear is recovered a little at least.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, I am grateful.

1500 Before commencing I do want to refer to the hon. Lady's mention earlier in her speech, of women in politics. That was at the commencement of her speech. It must be said at this point, that the generic reference made by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in his speech that there will be photo ops in the leadership campaign has been twisted and misrepresented.

I have here what the Leader of the Opposition stated in his Budget speech and it was that:

Whatever happens on that side it looks certain that we will witness the longest leadership election campaign in history, because we already have at least two contenders and the actual vacancy may not arise for some time. So it may mean that the upstaging campaign of social media promotion or photo opportunities will long continue. We think we know who he is backing, although one never really knows.

1505 There is nothing in there suggesting any sort of comments by the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition about the Hon. Lady's, the Hon. Minister's UN visit. One cannot take a generic comment made in the context of the leadership election that is to ensue, and twist it to mean something that is pejorative to women.

1510 As a woman, as a parliamentary colleague, I want to extend my congratulations to the hon. Lady for being the first Gibraltarian woman to address the UN. As she and others will be aware, I have since my first election campaign in 2019 advocated for there to be more women in politics. Indeed, it must be said that I have had nothing but support from my male colleagues, not

least from the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition who, Madam Speaker, is my mentor both in the legal profession and now in my political endeavours.

1515 It is an absolute honour to serve in a Parliament where there are five women, with you, Madam Speaker, as the first female Speaker that Gibraltar has had. We have made history as the Gibraltar Parliament with most female Members in its composition.

Things are changing, women are gaining more representation, but we are still nowhere near where we should be and there is still very much to be done to attract more women into politics, into positions of leadership within our community.

1520 Perhaps I sound like a broken record because I persistently repeat the same mantra, Madam Speaker, but I will never tire of saying that, not until we achieve not just equality, but also equity in representation. I recently participated in a Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians webinar on Barriers to Women's Participation and Representation and, Madam Speaker, let me say that I was dismayed to hear that only 23.3% of Cabinet members worldwide heading ministries
1525 are women. Not even a quarter.

For our part, change must start here in this House. It is not attractive to a mother with young children – nor a father for that matter – to have no clue as to something as simple as when Parliament will be sitting. It plays havoc with childcare, and not everyone has access to private childcare. Many rely on family and friends.

1530 It may sound small, but simple changes like these make the world of difference and lay the foundations for increases in the number of women who may be considering participating in politics. We await those much-needed reforms to the way in which this House conducts its work. *[Banging on desks].*

1535 Madam Speaker, money makes the world go round. It is as timeless a concept as is truth or shame, authenticity or patience. But money cannot buy any of the pillars of good governance like transparency, accountability or integrity, and all those are needed to ensure that taxpayers' money is used for the benefit of all and not just for the enrichment of a few at the top to the detriment of others; particularly those who are most vulnerable and those who have least financial means in society.

1540 Those, Madam Speaker, are the people within our society who suffer the worst impact when taxpayers' money is frivolously spent and sometimes limited resources are not utilised in the best way possible, or redirected in the most efficient way.

Poverty is still very much something that many do experience in Gibraltar and with the soaring cost of living it is becoming ever more difficult for many to access the basics and that, sadly and increasingly, includes healthcare.

1545 We have heard for some years now that the reason behind much of the debt that Gibraltar finds itself in is attributable to the COVID-19 pandemic. Far too many times answers to questions in this House still attribute shortcomings in the healthcare system, shortfalls in resources for law-enforcement agencies and inefficiencies to that pandemic, when the route cause is
1550 mismanagement of finances.

1555 Before sitting down to prepare this Budget speech, I listened to several speeches given by Opposition colleagues in the past few years and the themes, concerningly, remain the same. Despite the billions in debt that the Government finds itself in, there are still countless instances of frivolous expenditure, lack of controls and an unwillingness or inability towards transparency to the public for the way in which irresponsible spending impacts upon people's daily lives.

There is rarely a more significant impact upon life than where it concerns ill health, be that in terms of physical or mental health. You can be the richest person around but if you do not have health then you have nothing, Madam Speaker.

1560 Imagine now what life must be like for those who have neither health nor the wealth to seek treatment to improve matters, because in the past nine months it has become increasingly obvious to me that there are a great many people within our society who find themselves exactly in that boat and some, having rowed against the current and countless storms for a long time, will wait for many years to see land.

1565 For some, Madam Speaker, their boat will sadly never reach land at all because it will be too late. For many, not having the financial resources means that they cannot at times access healthcare, which should be far from reality in a system which should be set up to provide *everyone* with healthcare based on needs and not on a person's ability to pay.

1570 That was a right enshrined within GHA's formalised constitution, implemented by this Hon. Chief Minister's Government in 2019, and which has since disappeared from the GHA's website. As the anthropologist and physician, Paul Farmer said:

If access to health care is considered a human right, who is considered human enough to have that right?

In the past nine months since the last election I have met, spoken to and had email correspondence with a great many individuals who have told harrowing stories of their experiences as GHA service users. The common themes which unite all those individuals, with very unique stories, seems very much to be a lack of or inefficient use of resources.

1575 Let me be clear: we have got the talent and the willingness within the GHA to deliver excellence in healthcare, but even the most talented burn out and even the most talented require resources at their disposal.

1580 Although I will inevitably hone into some specific areas within this address, the list of issues is not exhaustive and any areas which I have not specifically flagged need not be taken to be completely without issues. In fact, the opposite is true.

There are far too many areas where concerns have been raised to point every single one of them out today. We would need weeks, Madam Speaker, perhaps months to dissect them all. But that does not mean that I will not address those during the life of this Parliament, and the public should rest assured that that will be so.

1585 Some of the first Questions which I asked in this House pertained to the ambulance fleet, and it is extremely worrying to say that this is a subject on which Questions in this House, coverage by the media and public debate has been plentiful, particularly in recent years. The fact is that the GHA's ambulance fleet has needed new vehicles since this Government came into power in 2011, and it has taken them 12 years to commence the urgently needed replacement of the current fleet of ambulances via a formalised regeneration plan.

1590 Unfortunately, this has not happened before thousands of taxpayers' pounds have been spent on mechanical work on those vehicles, which has equated to putting a plaster on an incision made during open-heart surgery and sending the patient home within hours of their arrival in the post-op recovery room.

1595 The number of times that ambulances have broken down at critical moments since the last election is shocking, to say the least, and an indictment on the lack of financial prudence and the prioritisation by this Government of the aesthetic and the popular over urgently needed crucial necessities.

1600 From 2019 to 2023 the GHA incurred £191,150.43. So, Madam Speaker, almost £200,000, in respect of mechanical works to the ambulance fleet. The GHA then had to rely on the Spanish company, Helicopteros Sanitarios, for a period of five weeks at the commencement of this year so that it would have access to a High Dependency Unit, because the GHA does not have one, yet.

1605 The St John Ambulance High Dependency Unit, which the GHA relied upon and pays for the use of, also happened to be over 10 years old at the time and therefore, under Spanish law, unable to operate in such capacity in Spain. The cost of contracting Helicopteros Sanitarios for a period of just five weeks was €57,139.76.

1610 The cost of the High Dependency Unit that has been ordered for the GHA which, incidentally, we were initially told was to arrive in October 2023 and then in March of this year, and take between five to seven weeks to adapt and has not yet arrived ... Indeed we have heard today from the Hon. Minister that it is due to arrive now after summer, as well as the two new frontline emergency vehicles was £281,748.

When one considers the amount spent in the past four and a half years on maintenance of the current fleet, it is easy to see that at least one new vehicle, if not two, could have been purchased with the money spent and already been operational.

1615 Madam Speaker, in a document of September 2018 entitled 'Operational Productivity and Performance in English NHS Ambulance Trusts', which followed a review, the observation was made that:

Maintenance costs for vehicles in operational use for less than six years are on average £4,200 a year. Once a vehicle is in use for over six years, this increases to £6,900 on average.

I do appreciate that we are in Gibraltar and not in England, but many of the points made herein are relevant to our fleet.

An older fleet is, therefore, generally more costly to operate than a modern fleet. They also are likely to become less reliable and more prone to breaking down. Ambulance trusts did not routinely collect data on this. The operational life of an ambulance depends on the base vehicle, maintenance regime and mileage. At seven years the average ambulance will have travelled around 350,000 miles and is likely to have required the engine to be replaced. The consensus amongst ambulance fleet managers is that this should generally be considered an upper limit for an operational ambulance in daily use. For some models, this should be even lower at five years. We were told that a modern fleet can help increase staff morale and helps decrease the risk of infection. This is because there are fewer areas for potential infection to develop, for example in cracks, dents or tears in the cabinetry and seating of older vehicles.

1620 Madam Speaker, it is beyond concerning that there does not appear to be a proper maintenance programme for the maintenance of these essential vehicles, which are frontline healthcare equipment that is critical in emergency situations. Not to mention, the fact that older vehicles are no doubt likely to be less fuel-efficient than more modern vehicles, thereby adding to operational costs. As well as being more polluting, which is ironic when considering the pollution
1625 levy of £520 per annum that the Government were prepared to charge owners of vehicles that were over 10 years old at the commencement of this Budget session.

If that is not bad enough, the already dire situation has been compounded by the fact that there has also, until very recent months, been a lack of a formal programme for the regeneration of the fleet, which is just one more example of failing to future-proof our health system, that has
1630 ended up costing the taxpayer more than was necessary, as well as putting patient safety at risk, which this Government continues to do whilst the GHA waits for the new vehicles to arrive by continuing to rely on the existing ambulance fleet in the meantime.

I am certain that, when given the choice, many a Gibraltar citizen would have chosen the purchase of a new ambulance fleet over redevelopment of the entrance to the Hospital, as was
1635 the initial plan for the use of the £2.7 million in the COVID Fund. Thankfully, the public voice prevailed on that issue and the planned project did not proceed.

It is notable, however, that the £2.7 million would allow for the purchase of the entire fleet of the new ambulances which the GHA is in desperate need of, and there would still be funds left over from that to invest in infrastructure to house our ENTs and our paramedics.

1640 On the subject of desperation, Madam Speaker, I would be remiss if I did not address the subject of mental health in this speech. No matter how many times I mention it, it will never be enough, because issues of mental health have traditionally been on a back foot within society when compared with funding and with support for initiatives which address physical health.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, this area needs far more support to get to where it needs to be.
1645 Currently, a proportion of the Health budget is allocated to mental health services annually, as with other individual departments within the GHA. The time has come, however, to allocate a separately identifiable budget to mental health services to allow for targeted funding of the areas, which a specially recruited individual would consider are in most dire need of the allocation of those resources.

1650 Mental health is a highly specialised area which requires a different approach from generalised healthcare. Given that the Government's position is that they are already spending significant amounts on mental health services, this separation would not cost anything and would provide further transparency as to the allocation of resources.

1655 Time and time again we hear of the inordinate delays suffered by some of the most vulnerable members in our community who require the services of the mental health system, which are failing many.

Just because something is deemed to be better than it was, does not mean that it is in a satisfactory or acceptable place. I very much welcome the Minister's position on this, that there is still much to do. Perhaps much more than the Government even realise or wish to accept.

1660 We keep hearing how the complement of psychiatrists and psychologists is complete and how waiting times are gradually coming down, but we do not hear of how the conclusion that the complement is complete has been arrived at. Or by who.

1665 Nevertheless, that does not address the very real issues that service users experience when they need immediate help, and they must wait months on end to access that support. What does the person suffering from a mental health crisis do while the waiting times are reducing? What should the parents of a child awaiting assessment for Autism Spectrum, ADHD or other such neurodevelopmental disorders do?

1670 They are forced to wait and their symptoms to worsen, which in turn only serves to increase the pressure on the service. Because when it comes to mental health, unlike in other areas of healthcare, treatment is often continuous and more than one session is usually required to address the issues that service users present with.

1675 This all conspires, Madam Speaker, to paint a picture of a Government in massive debt, forced to take the decision to cut services for lack of funds. Take the five trainee counsellors that were recruited last year and have been undertaking their training. Having seen at least 45 service users in the process on a voluntary basis only to be informed that their services would no longer be required in May of this year. The reason provided for that by the Hon. Minister was the need for the establishment of a formalised training programme.

1680 But when one considers that the trainees had already been undertaking the role for which they were training and were relieving fully-trained counsellors of a significant workload, the reasoning provided falls by the wayside. Worse still, we now have a situation whereby the GHA could continue to benefit from free services from some of these trainee counsellors, some who have some training hours outstanding and they have refused it.

1685 The Hon. Minister's response that a meeting has been set up to speak with those trainee counsellors, some of whom are now fully qualified, is another example of reacting when this Government realises that people are not simply going to go silent when they have been treated like expendable commodities.

A meeting to assuage these professionals is not going to address excessive delays in the waiting times for service users to see a counsellor. It does nothing for the lack of continuity of care, and even less for GHA staff morale and trust in the Government that employs them.

1690 When asked whether plans for the establishment of the new Community Mental Health Facility involved an increase in the staffing complement, the response was that there were no immediate plans and that this would be kept under review. It is yet another example of a Government that is reactive in its approach and not proactive. It is all well and good to provide shiny new facilities, but if the infrastructure is not present to support it then the service user will not gain the intended benefit.

1700 Moving on, Madam Speaker, to the intended repatriation of some of the services provided by the GHA to Gibraltar. Whereas the intention is laudable and in principle should produce cost savings in an area which clearly absorbs a large proportion of the overall Health budget – and I observe here that there was a difference of over £6 million between 2023-24 estimated expenditure for sponsored patients, which was £10 million, and the forecast outturn of £16,060,000 – the reality is that we must also be conscious of our size. And the fact that,

particularly in the state in which public finances are currently, we are unlikely to have the resources to provide the sometimes highly specialist, diagnostics and treatments that some GHA service users require. Not all, but some.

1705 Indeed, where there are plans for the introduction of new services, so too should there be plans to review the staffing complement, prior to the launch of those new services. I fear, Madam Speaker, that waiting to review how things develop will only produce a situation where service users are presented with state-of-the-art facilities with not enough staff to run them, which compromises quality of care and could also compromise patient safety.

1710 It is, therefore, welcome that the intention is recruitment of new staff before, for example, the new Catheterisation Lab is opened. Nevertheless, shouldn't the new Oncology suite, which most certainly appears to increase the Department's capacity, also result in the recruitment of further staff, be that clinical or administrative?

1715 Recruitment prior to the opening of a new Department, Madam Speaker, provides an opportunity for training and for the staff to orient themselves with the new environments and equipment before the services are rolled out to service users. The risks of taking a reactive approach, as we often see with this Government, is that existing staff are often left to shoulder the burden of added responsibilities without any review of remuneration.

1720 It leads to demotivation, resentment and too many times burnout. Which in the long term costs the service and the taxpayer even more, not to mention the impact that it has on continuity of care for patients, and the well-being of the workforce.

1725 But increases in the number of staff cannot be the only way in which improvements can be achieved. The efficient use of the resources that the GHA already has is imperative in improving the service. There has been a 5% increase in staffing levels within the Health Authority – and that translates to an increase of 58 to the complement to be exact – and yet it is not reflected in the still excessive waiting times for referrals, the lack of communication between Departments that we still see, and the experiences that too many service users are reporting.

1730 It is not the fault, Madam Speaker, let me be clear, of the dedicated and talented staff of the GHA, but rather the system that they must work within and the lack of resources that they are forced to toil with.

On the subject of this Government's approach to management of the Health Authority, it is no secret that there is great concern on this side of the House in respect of the restructure of the Health and Care system announced by the Hon. Minister Arias-Vasquez in April of this year.

1735 I will leave the details as to the issues surrounding the Care system to my hon. colleague, Mrs Sanchez, as Shadow Minister for Care. But I do express great reservations as to the creation of a Health and Care Authority, which would result in a department of massive proportions and all the administrative complexities that would arise when integrating systems that are completely different.

1740 The GHA in and of itself is already a large Department in terms of the size of our small nation, with its own complexities as to budgetary allocation and resources. The combination of the medical and social care spheres, which typically have different funding models, are likely to present significant challenges in the alignment of both. Can the distinct interests and systems of these areas really come together in a way that does not sacrifice the effectiveness of each to competing interests?

1745 Inevitably, there will also be need for expenditure for this marriage to happen. Processes and systems will need to be adapted to allow for this new super Department to function, and staff will require training. In the unavoidable period of transition, it is highly likely that issues will arise.

1750 The key will be whether such a large service will have the sufficient resources and framework in place to cope with the changing demands on it. It seems to me rather unlikely, considering the obvious attempts at cost savings that are taking place.

If this Government's message is that financial prudence is of the utmost necessity, then for what reason is the Hon. Minister embarking on this integration of these services, and at such an unstable time in terms of what is to come regarding Brexit? The plan appears to be contradictory

1755 to the aims of the 'Reset, Restart and Recover' programme, announced by this Government less than three years ago.

Regarding, Madam Speaker, the Minister's intended take over as Chair of the GHA Board, there is cause to be cynical about this proposal. You see, Madam Speaker, the real issue does not lie in the fact that the Minister is actually to sit on that Board, although it remains to be seen whether they have learnt from mistakes of the recent past and they avoid micromanagement. The big issue
1760 lies in the fact that this Government made a song and dance about abandoning that approach in 2021, and we now see a complete U-turn a mere two years and eight months after the Minister's predecessor announced this Government's plan to reconfigure the GHA board to:

Ensure that it functioned as the key strategic and oversight body for the GHA. This change would separate the functions of the GHA and the Ministry of Health and Care and included the appointment of a new independent Chair of the GHA.

When this Government came into power in 2011, they set about making changes to the structure of the GHA which, slowly, they have now realised, have taken them nowhere. What we
1765 are seeing now is a return to the same structure that the GSD had in place, just with different nomenclature for the CEO as Director General, and the Minister chairing the GHA. Having scorned it at the start of this Administration, they have now decided that it may be the way in which the system works after all.

These wild swings in a policy that is so very central to the way in which our Health Service is run indicate that the Government is either directionless, or that they cannot get it right and they
1770 are forced to oscillate between policies as a reaction to mismanagement, which causes them to have to return to the drawing board with alarming frequency.

The Health budget is the biggest of all received by Government Departments, and with the level of that expenditure there must be strict financial controls in place, and an emphasis on data
1775 gathering to identify the areas where funding and resources are most needed and to drive policy in that direction. I do thank the Hon. Minister for her invitation to see the Omnicell system in play. I will very much like to see that system at work.

In a nutshell what the GHA needs, Madam Speaker, is a Minister that does not micromanage, and independent and professional managers who are not stifled by ministerial intervention.
1780 It remains to be seen whether the most recent approach will finally be successful. Given this Government's history in this area, I have serious misgivings.

Turning now, Madam Speaker, to the Justice portfolio, the portfolio under which all our law enforcement agencies, emergency services and court services fall. It is under this portfolio that the responsibilities for ensuring public order and safety, protecting individual rights and liberties,
1785 and ensuring access to justice comes. A deficit in the funding and resources available to the Departments that fall under this portfolio translates into compromising public order, health and safety, exposing individual rights and liberties to abuse and curtailing access to justice.

I have in the past nine months, and beyond, due to having been a practising lawyer until recently, had plenty of examples brought to my attention of the impact that a lack of funding and
1790 resources is having on these areas. We need only take a walk on Main Street to realise quickly that there is a distinct lack of police presence. Our iconic 'bobbies on the beat' are declining in numbers at an alarming rate.

Morale is at an all-time low and the reasons given by officers for this in the survey by the Police Federation at the beginning of this year ranged from poor organisational management, high stress
1795 levels and a poor work/life balance, coupled with the fact that officers feel that this is not adequately remunerated and that they could be earning more elsewhere.

The survey showed that 97% of officers are dissatisfied with their salary and allowances compared to other uniformed bodies. It was also very significant that a lot of the pressure is down to low staffing levels, with 90% of officers requesting more resources. The RGP's complement
1800 of 258 was 34 officers down in October of last year.

1805 When I press the Hon. Minister for Justice in this House for answers as to how these issues are going to be addressed, I am oftentimes referred to the recent complement of recruits who passed out earlier this year. In his Budget speech yesterday, we heard of the recruitment of 12 new officers who are currently in training and who are expected to be deployed soon, and of a number of vacancies, all of which we of course welcome.

However, whereas recruitment is of course the obvious way to address staffing levels, it appears that the other, which is the implementation of retention strategies, is neglected. It is not a wonder that there are over 15,000 unexecuted warrants of arrest in Gibraltar. The RGP's resources are stretched to the limits just in dealing with day-to-day operational duties.

1810 The high turnover of officers is testament to the low level of morale and decreased job satisfaction in the force. Who wants to work in a high pressured and high-risk role when they are not even provided with the resources to adequately carry out their basic responsibilities, and must spend half of their time fire-fighting the inadequacies in the system?

1815 Resources being stretched to breaking point really is a theme that permeates throughout the Departments that fall under the Justice portfolio. We only need to look to recent threats as to industrial action by Borders and Coastguard officers due to health and safety risks. They should not have to reach the stage where strikes are the only way forward, especially when it concerns health and safety risks in the workplace.

1820 This is meant to be a Socialist Government, Madam Speaker. One in which, in theory, workers' rights should be central, not an afterthought. This Government should sit up and take notice. Their approach should be proactive, and once again not reactive when there is little other option remaining to them to keep the peace. These are the men and women who patrol our frontiers and keep us safe. Where is their basic setup?

1825 Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, Borders and Coastguard are not the only Agency suffering from a lack of resources which negatively impacts the way in which they can operate. Customs is another Agency where Government's unwillingness to maintain equipment, like the launches – or is it perhaps an inability due to there being no funds available for this purpose – is wreaking havoc with their operational capabilities, as well as risking the safety of our Customs officers.

1830 What, Madam Speaker, is the purpose of expensive equipment when there is no regular upkeep of the same? Simply being able to say that agencies have been provided with tools is never going to be enough when those tools are not functioning.

1835 Madam Speaker, where is the succession planning? We see a lack of this throughout the Civil Service. What happens when a senior, experienced and specialised officer leaves or retires, or even if they are on long-term sick leave? Are others being provided training early enough to enable a smooth transition or cover? Is recruitment being targeted specifically enough with a view to having the right people coming up the ranks who can take on these specialist roles in future?

1840 The answer appears to be no, because what this Government then does in those scenarios is to spend extra on temporary solutions, consultants or external companies; or, worse still, the roles remain vacant and the responsibilities are assumed by others who may not have the capacity or the specialised skillset to undertake them.

1845 Budgeting must take more account of equipment maintenance programmes, retention and regular audits of law enforcement capabilities and needs, so that gaps in resources can be identified and addressed earlier on, before the issues grow so exponentially that they then require a far higher level of expenditure to address them. The cost of this failure is not just to the public purse, it is to the ability of these law enforcement agencies to carry out their duties diligently and in a safe way. The cost is also one of human resources, because retention within too many law enforcement agencies is a serious issue; and lack of motivation and burnout are rife.

1850 On the subject of the social impact that limited resources or misallocation of funds have, if we consider that the Prison did not have counselling available to inmates for over three years, because of a lack of succession planning and unavailability of resources, it is easy to see how society is being failed by this Government's mismanagement of the public purse.

1855 One of the most central aims of a prison sentence should be rehabilitation. I have said it and I say it time and time again. Without counselling inmates are not being given the best opportunities to address psychological, emotional and social issues that are often contributors towards offending behaviour. There is much to be said for the benefits of proper counselling to prepare an inmate to transition back into society. Madam Speaker, it lays the foundations for that person to become a productive member of society.

1860 The consequence of a lack of counselling at the Prison is that our society ends up with a revolving door of offenders whose issues are never addressed; crime rates worsen, which we have seen in particular in respect of juvenile crime; and inevitably the knock-on effect is that there is a higher cost to the taxpayer and the cycle continues.

1865 It must therefore be said also that many of the offenders who would benefit from counselling are young offenders, for whom there is no facility available outside of the adult prison population. If a child or young person is not given the right support when they have lost their way, we cannot hope that they will break offending cycles in adulthood, and we have seen that time and time again. I have unfortunately seen plenty of examples for myself when I was practising as a criminal defence lawyer. Madam Speaker will have seen examples also in her capacity as a judge. Many young offenders are bright individuals with plenty of potential, but if resources are not allocated to this area, then crime becomes their way of life.

1870 Madam Speaker, I am not criticising for the sake of doing so, nor to score political points. The people have had enough of – to use a colloquialism – ‘las peleas de patio’. I like to think that a great part of my role is to advocate for the vulnerable, the voiceless and those who feel hopelessly failed by society. The French philosopher, author and political activist, Albert Camus, famously said that:

By definition a government has no conscience. Sometimes it has a policy, but nothing more.

1875 I cannot agree with that quote in its entirety because a government is made up of humans who can choose to have a conscience. The Budget is an opportunity for a government to extend a much-needed lifeline to better the lives of Gibraltarians and those who have chosen to make Gibraltar their home, not to increase hardships on those who are unable to make ends meet, despite hard work, long hours and untold sacrifices.

1880 A social conscience is as necessary as economic savvy to deliver a better future and it is that which I implore Ministers to check in on when making decisions that hit at the very heart of our people’s welfare. A lot has been said of the new dawn that was being heralded in when the current Government came into power in 2011. But, as the old adage goes, Madam Speaker:

Red sky at night, shepherd’s delight, red sky in the morning shepherd’s warning.

The new dawn, Madam Speaker, perhaps that is what they were warning about after all.

1885 Thank you.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn to take the speech from the Hon. Minister for Employment and Culture at 3 p.m. The show must, after all, go on.

1890 **Madam Speaker:** We will recess until 3 p.m.

The House recessed at 12.55 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 6.45 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 3rd July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

The Appropriation Act 2024 – Second Reading – Debate continued

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C P Santos.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker,
5 as Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture, Tourism, as well as Training and Youth, I address
you today with a deep sense of purpose and a deep sense of commitment. Through the prism of
the array of portfolios under my care, I am reminded daily of how our society is interconnected
and of the boundless potential that lies within each of us.

10 In this Chamber, where we are entrusted to make decisions that will affect the lives of all those
that call Gibraltar their home, we have the unique privilege, responsibility and opportunity to
shape the course of our collective future as a people.

Today, as we gather to discuss the allocation of resources and the priorities of our Government,
we do so with a singular focus: to build a society where every individual, regardless of background
or circumstance, can both thrive and contribute meaningfully.

15 I can say this because our Government has done just that for people exactly like me. I am a
product of the GSLP's commitment back in 1988, to ensure everyone had the opportunity to study,
train and work and become more than we could ever have aspired to be.

20 I was enabled to continue my education in the arts, a career choice not stereotypical for
Parliament, although I recognise I walk in the shoes of great thespian politicians, like Labour
Member of Parliament the late Glenda Jackson MP, an Oscar winner, and of course my colleague
the Hon. John Cortes, a Drama Festival winner too. *(Laughter)*

Yet today I stand before you, Madam Speaker, alongside my esteemed colleagues, all from
different backgrounds and socio-economic circumstances.

25 I am the living embodiment of the result and success of the GSLP's commitment to its people,
and for the information of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, much more than just the creator of
Rock Masters as well as many other beloved characters that played to sold out audiences at local
theatres.

30 The responsibilities encompassed within my portfolio – equality, employment, culture,
tourism, training and youth – reflect the multifaceted nature of our society. They remind us that
our vision of progress must be comprehensive, inclusive and forward thinking.

I am fortunate indeed to have a portfolio that I *truly* believe in, I can identify with and which
I will work my hardest to grow and develop.

35 In this, my first annual budget address today, you will find a statement of our values and
priorities as a Government. A statement of our blueprint for a society where diversity is
celebrated, where opportunity is accessible to all and where the aspirations of our youth are
nurtured and realised.

We aim to forge a path towards a future where equality is not just a goal, but a lived reality; where employment is not just a means of livelihood, but a source of dignity and fulfilment; where culture is not just a reflection of our past, but a source of inspiration for our shared future; where
40 tourism is not just an economic opportunity, but a bridge that connects us to the world; where training is not just an investment, but a pathway to empowerment; and where the youth are not just the leaders of tomorrow, but the agents of change today.

Those are our articles of faith in these areas of my ministerial responsibility.

Madam Speaker, I trust that what I have said to preface my address has laid out clearly the
45 context for everything else that follows. I will open with the Ministry of Equality. This Department focuses on promoting and safeguarding equality and human rights. We deal with all the protected characteristics, the personal traits that we will not allow as reasons to discriminate against anyone in our society.

We have worked on all areas since April 2023, from Disability to Gender Equality with ongoing
50 projects and the creation of new initiatives.

Madam Speaker, I am very proud to be the Minister for Equality and to follow in the footsteps of the Hon. Samantha Sacramento who was the first ever Minister for Equality in the first ever Ministry of Equality in Gibraltar. This was a portfolio which was established by the Chief Minister for the first time after the election of the GSLP Liberals in 2011. Samantha held this position for
55 12 years and I had the pleasure of working on projects with her during that time, even before I joined Cabinet.

Ms Sacramento is a close personal friend who I have known since childhood and I would like to take this opportunity to credit and thank her for the dynamism, her fortitude and integrity, and for her tenacity which enabled her to change the equality landscape in Gibraltar. (*Banging on
60 desks*)

During her extensive and very successful tenure, and given her passion, energy and commitment, the Hon Samantha Sacramento ensured that the Ministry of Equality was pioneering in its vision, ethos, policies and of course most importantly on legislation. Landmark legislative changes such as the Surrogacy Act in 2021 regulated surrogacy arrangements and established
65 legal parenthood in cases of assisted reproduction arrangements.

The Civil Partnership Bill in 2014 enabled the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex. This was followed by the Civil Marriage (Amendment) Act in 2016 which allowed for the civil marriage of same sex couples, something I am currently enjoying the fruits of today – and what a wedding it was!

These are all examples of the ground-breaking work effected by the former Minister and the
70 team at the Ministry of Equality. The work she undertook for persons with disabilities in launching the RADAR Key Scheme and the introduction of the Disability Information Card has made the lives of countless people in Gibraltar that much better.

Equality is important to me personally. As an openly gay man it has been heartbreaking to sit
75 and watch Parliament and listen to some Members of the Opposition express their negative opinions about the legislative rights of the LGBTQ+ community, especially in regard to equal marriage. As we cannot forget that LGBTQ+ rights are Human Rights.

I am sure that this feeling I had was shared by women when the discussion came up about their reproductive rights. That is why I proudly stand with my party, a party that upholds and enforces
80 policies of respect, equality and choice. I, as well as many others in our community can now live our truest lives safely and honestly due to the legislative changes this Government has made which enable and protect us.

Progressive at the time, divisive even in showing how different we are from Members opposite, but always inclusive. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker, for the benefit of our new Members I wanted to recap on the work
85 Ms Sacramento did. I have just touched upon a few of her achievements, but I could mention so many more. I can honestly say it is a privilege to pick up the mantle and continue to develop her work.

I pledge to work in the same indefatigable fashion and to build upon her legacy for the good of
90 *all* of our citizens. It is imperative to raise awareness of equality.

During the first six months of the financial year, my predecessor successfully worked on the extension of its training provision on equality matters for Government Departments and across the public sector.

105 In April 2023 the then Ministry of Equality was invited to participate in the Department of Education's In-Service days for all education staff.

Three training workshops on 'Unconscious Bias and Challenging Stereotypes in the Classroom' were delivered and were attended by a total of 60 participants including teachers, special needs learning support assistants, and students completing their Postgraduate Certificate of Education at the University of Gibraltar.

100 These sessions, Madam Speaker, are important in embedding our core values of social justice and fairness amongst the younger members of our community. The importance of challenging stereotypes, particularly gender stereotypes, is central to the work at the Ministry of Equality. This often goes hand in hand with initiatives which address the under-representation of women in male-dominated fields, such as in firefighting.

105 A live virtual presentation was given to Notre Dame Lower Primary School by the Antarctic Fire Angels, an all-female team of firefighters. Initiatives such as these give children the message that they can choose any and all careers and are not limited on grounds of gender. My Ministry looks forward to further collaborations with our colleagues in Education on similar projects.

110 Gender Equality is also big on my agenda and in June 2023 we saw the 4th Women's Mentorship Programme, one of the key initiatives in our equality strategy. Maximising the talents and skills of both women and men in equal measure is an objective that we can all back and more importantly that we can *all* benefit from.

115 It has been comprehensively established that a more gender-balanced workforce is the key ingredient for success for organisations, businesses and for national economies. Later on, I will expand on the value of a diverse workforce and its impact on business and society.

The 5th cycle of the programme commenced in February 2024 with a cohort of 27 mentees, bringing the total number of mentees since the inception of the programme to 131.

120 Feedback is hugely positive and this year we have extended the one-to-one sessions to group sessions. This programme offers a fantastic opportunity for personal and professional growth and development and well-being.

I will continue to urge anyone interested in participating to contact my team.

And, Madam Speaker, if I may be so bold, perhaps you may consider joining us as a mentor next year! I will, of course, pass the information and the invitation to you more formally.

125 To further highlight and bring awareness to the historic under representation of women in Gibraltar, the Hon. Samantha Sacramento initiated the publication of '*Women of Gibraltar, Forgotten Narratives*'. My thanks to Claire Montado, CEO of the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, for this project which redresses the imbalance of the roles and achievements of women in so many spheres. The book has been enthusiastically received and is telling of our appetite for and interest in gender equality matters. It is beautifully written and an inspiration to all.

130 Our mission in the Ministry is to address issues that affect women *and* men, and as such International Men's Day is used to highlight the issues that can disproportionately affect men in comparison to their female counterparts.

135 Our focus this year was on promoting mental health. Globally, the suicide rates for men are much higher than for women. We invited the Department of Public Health and the GHA's Mental Health Services, local charities and NGOs that work in supporting mental health and well-being to the piazza to showcase their services to the public.

140 The Gibraltar Mental Welfare Society, GibSams, Childline, Clubhouse, Walking Together, Cye-Cyl, Prostate Cancer Support Group Gibraltar and the Citizens Advice Bureau all came on board to help us in our mission. My thanks to all of them for joining us. A discussion panel 'A Call to Men' was held to break the stigma around men's mental health and well-being.

It focused on the importance of eradicating barriers that may prevent boys and men seeking help, advice and support. Panellists were invited to speak frankly and openly about their personal experiences with mental health challenges, which has contributed positively to the momentum around mental health awareness and de-stigmatisation. I look forward to marking International Men's Day again later this year with further positive and constructive offerings.

Madam Speaker, on the flipside to Men's International Day we also marked International Women's Day. We worked with the Gibraltar Academy of Music and Performing Arts to create two events: 'Inspire Inclusion' a fireside chat event in collaboration with the Gibraltar Garrison Library, and 'La Maleta' an interactive performance.

The first attracted a full audience and generated vibrant and lively discussion during the Q&A section. The later sold out the three performances on offer which paid tribute to the generation of women who lived through the evacuation in Gibraltar. It was a very moving and sensitive piece.

And I would like to thank GAMPA, the Garrison Library, the Press Office and my team for their sterling efforts to mark International Women's Day.

To continue raising awareness of Equality issues, my Ministry is currently delivering training to several stakeholders through the Personnel and Development Department. This is open to all civil servants to homogenise and embed the understanding of Equality matters across the service. This past May, we delivered training workshops to the Gibraltar Football Association on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion to include unconscious biases and ways to mitigate these.

This is the first time that Equality training has been delivered to a non-governmental department, agency or authority, and I am encouraged to say it was very well received. These considerations are imperative for modern and forward-looking organisations. I am pleased we were able to support the GFA in this way.

To further make our society more equitable my Ministry continues to work on shared Parental Leave. This new and bespoke system of parental leave will give parents more choice and flexibility particularly in how they care for their child in the first year.

There are a number of wide-ranging social and financial implications involved which require a close scrutiny and revision, and a number of legislative changes which will warrant careful consideration and measured deliberation. We are in consultation with stakeholders in both the public and private sectors to include the GFSB, the Chamber of Commerce and Unite the Union, to consider the options available.

The Gender Gap on pay is another area my Ministry is working on. The Gender Pay Gap Survey is still being analysed and the results are expected to be announced imminently. We are also looking at securing more recent data to be able to understand how far we have come on gender equality and to identify what remains to be done. This project was commenced prior to my coming into office.

As you can imagine this has been a very involved issue but one which I am highly committed to bring to fruition sooner rather than later.

Madam Speaker, as I highlighted in the introduction of my Equality portfolio, the Ministry of Equality has made huge strides to ensure that LGBTQ+ rights are properly protected by legislation. These legislative changes are always accompanied, understood and embraced by awareness campaigns and community engagement.

Legislative changes mark and often initiate a cultural shift and changes in attitude. And I am very happy and grateful to say, Madam Speaker, that the Gibraltar of 2024 is a much more inclusive place than the Gibraltar for pre-2011.

Notwithstanding, and whilst this Government has ensured that legislation protects members of the LGBTQ+ community, we continue and will continue to mark Pride Month because there is no place in our community for homophobia, biphobia or transphobia. I would like to thank the LGBTQ+ Committee who lead on Pride Day and the parade. I am proud to continue collaborating with them on this and other projects throughout the year to create awareness and continue effecting change.

195 This year we have marked Pride with a panel event discussion to raise awareness of and to generate a positive conversation around LGBTQ+ issues. The importance of having LGBTQ+ allies was also a very important part of this discussion and calling out behaviour and language that is inappropriate, offensive, distressing or humiliating is an important factor in creating a mindful and respectful society for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We mark Pride, Madam Speaker, in ways that are strikingly visual as awareness is fundamental. We do this in several ways: by illuminating the Moorish Castle in rainbow colours; by flying the Rainbow Flag in prominent places throughout Gibraltar; and by supporting the Pride parade.

200 These are simple but powerful reminders to everyone that in an equitable and inclusive Gibraltar we are all of equal value and worth and that we are all entitled to and deserving of full respect at *all* times. There is no space in Gibraltar for hate and everyone has the right to lead true and authentic lives free from the fear of hostile or violent reactions from those around them.

205 Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Equality works closely with organisations that provide specialist and valuable services, one of which is the Citizens Advice Bureau. CAB continues to develop and train to expand their services. They assist people of all ages and people from minority groups who require help with language barriers. They run a Youth Volunteer Programme and have also employed two individuals from the Supported Employment programme into their organisation.

210 They provide practical advice on issues such as financial stability as well as emotional support to reduce stress and anxiety in areas of emotional trauma including depression, bereavement, relationship issues, stress, self-harm, addiction and suicidal thoughts.

215 Good mental health and well-being is so vital in any society. CAB's commitment to addressing the emotional and psychological needs of our community are in line with my own commitment to make Gibraltar inclusive and equitable.

Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the staff and volunteers at CAB for all they do for this community.

220 Madam Speaker, I will now turn to another characteristic we have been significantly developing within Equality: disabilities. Since my tenure commenced in Oct 2023, we have been able to merge the Supported Needs and Disability Office within my ministry. We have expanded the team in order to better manage the increasing demands and essential groundwork required to improve support and accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

225 The SNDO is committed to ensuring that our services meet the needs of this community through several key initiatives, to include: Enhanced Accessibility; Inclusive Education; Employment Opportunities; Community Engagement; Awareness Campaigns: and Support Services. Through these efforts, we aim to create a more inclusive society where individuals with disabilities have equal opportunities to thrive and participate fully in all aspects of life.

230 We developed an exercise in June 2023 as part of the Government's drive to make our buildings and services more accessible and thereby providing a more inclusive service to the community. We determined the current need across departments, agencies and authorities to have fixed or portable-hearing loop facilities available to staff and public. So far we have furnished several departments with these and will endeavour to have these in place for all relevant Government departments.

235 During the month of June in 2023 we engaged in the delivery of Disability Equality and Customer Care Training to Public Sector employees who are front-line members of staff and attend to the general public. This is a continuation of consistent training over the last seven years being made available to both the public and private sectors.

240 The training highlights the different barriers faced by people with disabilities, both physically and when communicating, and what can be done to overcome or prevent these. We will be introducing Disability Co-ordinators across Government Departments and the private sector, meaning that officials can be reminded of their duty to be inclusive and promote the rights of people with disabilities in accordance with the Disability Act.

245 My Ministry is committed to continue delivering regular training to Government staff and the general public and is further expanding the type of training being delivered. Training has since been delivered to Royal Gibraltar Police Recruits and PGCE students. The professional development of the SNDO staff is also a priority. Expanding on the expertise of the SNDO will help in our advising of other Departments.

250 The team attended the online Annual Professional's Conference on empowering professionals to understand autistic experiences and to kickstart Neurodiversity Week. A representative of the SNDO attended UK Care Week, the Neuro Convention and Naidex, coined 'The UK's leading event dedicated to empowering and supporting disabled individuals'.

SNDO staff received training on Blue Badge and Frontier Pass. And I am pleased to announce we have taken over responsibility from the Ministry of Transport for the issuing of the Blue Badge Scheme, an important service for people with severe mobility issues.

255 The SNDO is now represented on the Traffic Commission and it was our pleasure to assist my colleague, the Hon. Minister Cortes and the Ministry of Transport, in the piloting of the rollout of pictograms at zebra crossings, designed to enhance accessibility and particularly benefiting children and persons with learning difficulties and disabilities.

260 This groundbreaking project underscores the government's commitment to inclusivity and equal access in our transport network.

We have been working with my colleague the Minister for Health and Care, the Hon. Gemma Arias Vasquez and other stakeholders to help develop neurodevelopmental pathways. This work is integral to the provision of specialised care for children with ADHD and Autism Spectrum Disorder, ensuring tailored support and assistance for individuals and their families.

265 Together with the Department of the Environment we have worked to ensure that persons with disabilities also have some access to the sea as from Easter. As always, arrangements were made to have beach attendants available at Camp Bay during the Easter Weekend and all weekends thereafter until the official bathing season starts.

270 We held a Disability Fair in December 2023 to showcase the work done by the SNDO and charities and raise awareness. This will now become an annual event.

And I am truly excited to state that we have set up the Supported Needs and Disability Council made up of 12 different support groups, charities and individuals, all linked to supported needs and disability within our community.

275 The Select Committee on people with disabilities met in the Parliament Chamber for the first time on 5th February 2024 and here we all decided to put the subject matter before politics and the progress of this is something we all agree on. I cannot emphasise the importance of this enough as having a group of people focused on disabilities will no doubt bring new ideas and effect change.

280 Looking ahead, in late 2024 we will be introducing suicide awareness and disability etiquette training. Initiatives such as reaching out to the community for public donations of sensory toys and equipment, so they can be borrowed by families who are in need of them not only helps others but also makes people aware of persons with disabilities and what they may need.

285 We also listen to the community. The recent installation of men's sanitary bins in all public toilets followed representations from 'Prostate Cancer Gibraltar'. We will be implementing all areas mentioned within the recently completed Disability Strategy to include the extension of the UN convention on the rights for persons with disabilities that my team, led by Jenny Victory, have been working very hard on for the vast majority of the last eight months.

290 I am committed to ensuring that the services for persons with disabilities are enhanced and focused. With this said, I wish to introduce the 'End the Stereotypes' campaign, an awareness and acceptance campaign for every protected characteristic. The Ministry of Equality together with the Press Office will be producing a video campaign with the message that we are all capable of achieving greatness when afforded the right opportunities.

Moving on to disabilities and sports. In September 2023 we saw the launch of Special Olympics Berlin 2023 Documentary. The Ministry of Equality hosted the launch of a short film documenting

295 the journey and participation of the Gibraltar Special Olympics contingent at the Berlin 2023
Summer Games. The documentary also touched on our commitment to partnering with the
Special Olympics who are the world's largest sports organisation for children and adults with
intellectual disabilities.

To heighten our commitment to this and in accordance with my manifesto commitments, we
300 are also developing on Para-sports, together with the Ministry of Sport, also known as adaptive
sports or disability sports where sports are played by people with a disability, including physical,
intellectual and sensory disabilities. These sports are designed to allow individuals with disabilities
to compete in various athletic activities, promoting inclusion, physical fitness and social
interaction. This is an integral part of our 'End the Stereotype' campaign across my Ministries.

305 I am thrilled to state that plans are already well under way for a Corporate and Family Para-
sports day this coming September 2024 which will play a crucial role in promoting equality, health,
and social integration for individuals with disabilities. Continued support, awareness and
investment in these sports will help further their development and ensure that athletes with
disabilities can compete and excel at all levels.

310 The year ahead will see a continuation of all my commitments to support and enhance our
offerings, to include initiatives such as the Disability Information Cards, Radar Keys, Blue Badges
and Frontier Passes. Our work with the Disability Council and charities will continue and we will
continue to provide advice to other departments and stakeholders.

315 The 'End the Stereotypes campaign', of course is of immense importance to me as this is where
we can hopefully change perceptions in the community. The backbone to all the work we have
achieved and yet have to achieve as a Ministry will be reflected in the National Disability Strategy,
which is currently in the consultation phase.

We have had the input of multi-award-winning campaigner Celia Chartres-Aris who is a lobbyist
and policy designer and is named on the 2023 Global Diversity Leaders List. She is an expert on
320 ensuring that persons with disabilities are at the heart of legislative development. This strategy
will be the go-to document for Government and all other stakeholders.

My team and I are looking forward to the next year with the Strategy, the Disability Fair, Para-
sports and the day-to-day work including clinics that make the lives of people with disabilities that
much better in Gibraltar.

325 Madam Speaker, I now turn to another very significant and important aspect of my portfolio.

As Minister for Employment, I am responsible for training, apprenticeships and skills. I am
grateful to take on the mantel of this portfolio from my predecessor, the Father of the House, the
Hon. Sir Joe Bossano who has been a great source of knowledge in both the Employment and
Training portfolios. As a Government we are fully committed to creating an environment where
330 continuous learning and skill acquisition are prioritised. Investment in our people is the key to
maintaining our competitive edge and ensuring sustainable growth.

My team at the ministry conducted an extensive exercise looking at over 45,000 published
vacancies from October 2020 to date, to ascertain the gaps within the employment industries in
Gibraltar. This has given us a clear overview of the local job market and what training programmes
335 we need to work towards enabling.

When I came into office in October 2023, one of my primary objectives was to upgrade and
revamp the Gibraltar Training Centre. I believe that not everyone needs to choose an academic
route in order to succeed and I want to offer alternative avenues to career choices. My
commitment is to provide the tools for young people to maximise their potential.

340 In the short time I have been in office we have recruited three additional instructors for the
Training Centre in bricklaying, painting and decorating and electrical engineering. These were
necessary in order for us to launch these essential courses as soon as possible in these areas that
would meet industry demands.

345 At this point I wish to mention Richard Martinez, who is retiring in September after 24 years as
an Electrical Instructor for the Centre. I want to thank him for his service and wish him the very
best.

We have also recruited Dylan Podesta as Head of Training who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in this area. This is instrumental in developing the courses we aim to offer. His responsibilities extend to overseeing the necessary recruitment, procedural enhancements and management.

350

I am thrilled to report that on 22nd May 2024 we welcomed a new intake of 42 apprentices into the Level 1 Programme in Construction. They joined the 24 apprentices already previously enrolled at the Centre, bringing the total number to 66. Upon completion of this course, they will move to the Level 2 Programme where they can choose their preferred area of work and specialise in this.

355

This coming September will see a new cohort of a further 12 apprentices to enrol in electrical and mechanical engineering courses. The vocational courses offered at the centre have always provided numerous benefits to the apprentices. This includes specialised knowledge in specific fields of work, with shorter courses available in order to allow them to enter the workforce quicker. Not only does this offer apprentices career advancement opportunities but is a positive to our community as specific industries which face labour shortages will have a skilled and qualified pool of potential employees to select from.

360

We are also in the process of rebranding the Centre reflecting our commitment to providing high-quality vocational education and training. By enhancing our brand, we hope to attract more students and stakeholders who recognise the value and potential of the opportunities we offer. We are currently exploring the option of offering further short courses for those students who may not wish to engage in a full two- to three-year apprenticeship, and we are working closely with stakeholders within the construction industry who are supporting this initiative.

365

Our work regarding apprenticeships and skills development does not stop at the training centre. We are collaborating with the GHA and the Care Agency to further develop the 'Skills for Care' course which will offer more opportunities for people interested in joining the care sector.

370

We will also be continuing our collaboration with the insurance sector offering apprenticeships and work experience within this industry which will lead to FIT training. This is the basic qualification required in order to progress further within the insurance industry.

375

We are also exploring offering training in the hospitality sector. Plans for this are in their embryonic stage, but there is potential to provide training in this area too. Training, apprenticeships and skills development is not just beneficial, but absolutely essential for fostering individual growth, business success and economic vitality. This ensures that both individuals and organisations are well-equipped to meet the demands of the future. Investing in training is imperative for creating a more prosperous and equitable society.

380

Skills development is at the heart of my next initiative, the PATHS Programme. I mentioned this in passing recently in my Equality portfolio. But my Ministries are so interconnected that a lot of what my team and I are working on will feature in more than one area in my speech.

With the launch of the Professional Advancement Through Holistic Skills (PATHS) programme in April this year, our team is addressing the professional development of members of our community who may not have the resources to upskill themselves, both personally and professionally.

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PATHS is aimed at individuals who require support in the workplace, to include those transitioning from Supported Employment Programmes, prison inmates, individuals undergoing rehabilitation, or those who need to increase their employability via the ETB. These demographics often face unique challenges and barriers to employment, and PATHS offers tailored support and a personalised learning experience to help them overcome these obstacles and thrive in the workforce.

390

Our packages have been tailored to the needs of the current job skill gaps within the labour market which we have identified. These are currently courses in General Employability, Construction and Maintenance, Hospitality and Care, Retail and Development courses.

395

The courses are provided through an online platform, as well as face to face workshops. The courses are conducted at the Digital Skills Academy, who I wish to thank for their continued support.

400 On successful completion, participants receive certification from the course provider officially endorsed by myself on behalf of the Ministry.

Services also focus on confidence building, communication skills, mental health support and job coaching to ensure a well-rounded and effective support system.

405 Surveys completed by users are recording 100% positive feedback and all users have reported wishing to continue this training. Since its inception three months ago, PATHS has already engaged with 29 users from the Supported Employment Programme.

We would like to thank the Barzilai Foundation for their collaboration of this programme

410 Madam Speaker, the Supported Employment Programme has been developed further by my Ministry to build on the great work my esteemed colleague, the father of the House, the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano has already done through the Supported Employment Company which he founded to assist persons with supported needs and disabilities.

415 The company is now the financial arm of the programme. My staff have had extensive training as job coaches by the British Association of Supported Employment (BASE) who are the UK's national umbrella group for the supported employment sector. Their training is ongoing as part of my commitment to their own professional development, which will in turn benefit our candidates. We are now active members of BASE and will be attending their annual conference in November, to continue our dynamic alignment with our UK counterparts.

420 The team has created a bespoke 12-step working model, which is followed closely in order to identify candidates who meet the criteria to form part of the programme. A policy has also been produced by our team. Our Supported Employment Board reviews referrals and my staff works closely with the Supported Needs and Disability Office to hold clinics for these candidates.

425 Together they carry out vocational profiles to identify any skill gaps, and of course strengths to match the right employee with the right employer. Any skill gaps can be filled with our PATHS programme. We are actively seeking out employers to take part in our Supported Employment Programme. To this end, my Ministry organised a conference at the Sunborn on 5th June, called 'Empowering Journeys, Igniting Careers'. The conference was a resounding success, with 150 attendees from the private and public sector.

430 As a result of this we have made further engagement with potential employers who were inspired to be a part of our programme. Our aim is to eventually transition people from supported positions to direct and sustainable employment.

I would like to thank the Barzilai foundation once again for their sponsorship of this conference.

435 This programme is not just designed for people with supported needs or disabilities. Our Ministry is also developing the 'Rehabilitation and Prison Leavers' Employment Scheme', for persons who are undergoing rehabilitation or currently serving a prison sentence. This initiative is in close collaboration with Bruce's Farm, HMP Windmill Hill, the Department of Employment and other entities.

440 Our Ministry has established various working groups to develop this scheme to develop areas of Education, legislation and other initiatives, such as projects within the wood workshop at Windmill Hill. Our aim is to give every individual a pathway after leaving prison and this is a programme developed together with my colleagues the Minister for Justice and the Minister for Health and Care.

445 My ministry is also working with the GFA to use football as a vehicle for change and reform within the prison setting. Applied philosophy will also be taught to the prison cohort. We are also collaborating with various practitioners to develop communication skills, self esteem and general well-being at Bruce's Farm and HMP Windmill Hill, which I consider to be extremely important to the efficacy of the programme. Our extensive research has established the various job skill gaps within the labour market in Gibraltar and we are creating pathways to employment in these sectors.

450 Upon successful completion of the PATHS programme at HMP or in the rehabilitation programme at Bruce's Farm, the aim is to find employment for the user for six months under our scheme. This initiative will not only give the individual a sense of structure, purpose and empowerment, remunerated gainful employment will also assist in the reduction of reoffending and relapse rates. These are all really positive points for our society.

455 Madam Speaker, employment is important, for all individuals and for our community, not just economically but for well-being. So I now turn to my Employment portfolio.

My team and I continue to work tirelessly in the areas of employment and workers' rights, recognising that in the context of employment and labour-associated matters, everyone deserves access to justice and this is paramount to our administration.

460 Our commitment is demonstrated through the enforcement of fair and equitable opportunities to seek legal recourse, ensuring due process and protection of rights. The Labour Inspectorate is tasked with the regulation and enforcement of our employment laws, executing a rigorous programme of inspections across the various industries, to maintain compliance with employment legislation. This forms part of our over-arching strategy towards the eradication of illegal labour in Gibraltar.

465 The Department of Employment maintains a close and effective relationship with all sectors of the business community, ensuring a level playing field that promotes an environment of compliance with employment legislation. The Inspectorate remains a vital source for both employers and employees, offering guidance on all employment-related matters.

470 The Frontier Worker portal has successfully handled over 16,440 enquiries since its inception in December 2020, reflecting a high level of engagement. Over the past year, the Department has responded to a significant volume of email and telephone enquiries relating to employee statuses, providing technical guidance and clarifying workers' rights under the scope of the Withdrawal Agreement.

475 The Department of Employment continues to assist in investigating individual worker statuses while also sign-posting to various other Government Departments to ensure that workers' rights and services in Gibraltar are accessible and comprehensively addressed.

480 On the Employment Tribunal, I am pleased to share that the recent reforms have been successful and are now yielding tangible results. The Tribunal has significantly improved the efficiency of handling cases, ensuring that claims are addressed effectively. These improvements are part of a wider effort to enhance the overall user experience, promising a higher standard of service for all users who seek assistance from the Tribunal. This achievement reflects our steadfast commitment to maintaining a fair and responsive tribunal system.

485 Madam Speaker, I now take the opportunity to draw your attention to the important work we have been engaged in as part of the Health and Safety Advisory Council, which I have had the privilege of Chairing.

490 Last November, we successfully held our second Health and Safety seminar, focusing on 'Providing Safe and Healthy Work in the Digital Age'. This event featured talks by the heads of all public service, representatives from local charities and notably, local employers. We were also joined by the National Health and Safety Advisor from Unite the Union and the Chairman of the Institute of Occupational Safety in Gibraltar. The seminar was highly successful, facilitating meaningful discussions and providing actionable insights into Health & Safety practices within the digital framework.

495 Looking ahead, we are already preparing for this year's seminar, earmarked for 24th October 2024. The theme will be 'Building Sustainable Safety in a Rapidly Changing World'. This event further highlights our commitment to enhancing workplace safety and adaptability in this constantly changing environment.

500 In terms of the Registered Unemployed, I am pleased to report the following results and outcomes. Maintaining low unemployment levels is possible due to the consistent efforts of my dedicated team in the Department of Employment. The yearly average number for Gibraltarian registered unemployed in 2023 was 27, as already highlighted in the Chief Minister's opening

speech. This represents an impressive 93.86% reduction in unemployment since 2011, demonstrating the effectiveness of our initiatives.

Furthermore, the First Quarter of 2024, saw an average of only 20 registered unemployed Gibraltarians, a staggering 96% reduction in unemployment since the First Quarter of 2012.

505 Madam Speaker, the Government's proven employment stability is built on maintaining close working relationships, understanding and empathising with the specific individual seeking employment. Our approach has always been holistic, with a fundamental focus on understanding and addressing the specific needs of persons who are not in employment. This achievement is not merely about statistical success but a testament to our strategic planning, robust policy
510 implementation and effective coordination across various departments.

Our Employment Officers have been instrumental in reinforcing our commitment to workforce integration, working in close collaboration with my team at the Youth Service, ensuring a seamless referral process to bridge the gap for individuals eager to enter the workforce. We are committed to provide the necessary tools and support to all users seeking gainful employment. The
515 Department of Employment remains a pivotal resource for those looking to explore new opportunities or aiming to enhance their career trajectories. Users are guided to find positions that best match their interests and skills through personalised guidance.

We not only support individual career aspirations, we are also bolstering our community's economic stability and growth. Our commitment is to continue these efforts, ensuring that all
520 service users have the resources they need to succeed in today's dynamic job market.

Madam Speaker, this Department's success and value is not just evident in the statistics presented but in the quality of the support provided. Our commitment is to continue this momentum and ensure that our employment landscape remains as strong and promising. This
525 commitment is at the heart of our strategy, and it is reflected in the tangible results produced.

With this focus on employment, my team and I are keen to create opportunities for the younger generation also, so it is with great honour and responsibility that I now speak about the Ministry of Youth. I would like to thank my predecessor the Hon. Steven Linares for his fantastic work over the past 12 years. Having worked with young people myself my mission is to empower, inspire and support our younger generations as we recognise them to be the future leaders,
530 innovators and change-makers of our society.

In this Ministry, we always aim to address the needs and aspirations of our youth, ensuring they have the opportunities, resources and support necessary to thrive in an increasingly dynamic and challenging world. Our commitment is to create an environment where every young person can achieve their full potential, contributing positively to our community and beyond.

535 One of the ways we are empowering our youth into employment is with our Careers.gi website. This was launched in July 2023 and is designed to provide professional development opportunities to the young – and the not so young. This tool provides access to detailed information about local career paths to empower and to plan their education and career trajectories effectively. The aim is for it to become the central hub for all career-related information, resources and opportunities.

540 The Careers.gi website is a collaboration project between the CIPD Gibraltar Branch and the Gibraltar Youth Service currently sponsored by the Kusuma Trust. And a special thank you to Charlene Figueras for leading on this project from the Ministry of Youth. Our key priority this year is to continue developing the website with quality relevant content and expand the career options and training opportunities sections.

545 We are collaborating with employers and Government agencies to ensure information about their sector or industry is represented. Accessibility and usability of course, is at the fore, so everyone can benefit from the resources available. This platform for career development is an investment in our future workforce. The Youth Service focuses on varied areas: Education and Skills; Development, Health and Well-being; Employment and Entrepreneurship, Civic
550 Engagement and Leadership; Sports and Recreation; and last but not least, Arts and Culture.

Madam Speaker, I am elated to stand here today and confirm we have seen an increase in the use of our facilities this year by 6.9%. We have seen over 200 users coming into our clubs every week and on average 9.6 outreach users per month.

555 In a 12-month period we have provided our services an average of 10,400 times, without including the additional outreach we also engage in. The commitment of my staff is evident through the extensive array of activities and trips planned throughout the year. It is also evident in their commitment to the training and professional development programmes they attend in order to be fully equipped to provide adequate risk assessments for these events. Some staff also continue to form part of and contribute to various multi-agency forums, to include the Child
560 Protection Committee, Sub-Training Committee and the Youth Grants Committee.

Madam Speaker, our service users work on projects to engage and educate and express their unique viewpoints in order to feel validated. An example of this is the 'Your Voice Matters' project, an art exhibition for Mental Health Week where they created artworks based on their unique interpretations of the theme.

565 The Voice of Young People continued to meet weekly with representation from Youth Clubs, secondary schools and the college. They have continued to engage with organisations of interest, as well as Ministers and their Ministries. The Youth Production Group also meet weekly working on different projects throughout the year and the Youth Café is an open club environment that opens twice a week for young people aged 16+ to relax and enjoy a safe space where they can
570 share ideas, thoughts and opinions.

The Mingle project is in its 5th year and supports young adults ages 18-30 with mild learning needs with the aim of increasing their support networks and life skills. They continue to be part of the Youth Café and have engaged in a variety of activities and projects that support the development of their independence and life skills through targeted activities and workshops.

575 Thursday evenings are still and continue to be open to young people aged 11 to 15 as a drop-in service. The Youth Service took part in the careers project in the Civil Services Excellence and Innovation Awards led by our Chief Secretary whereby they had been nominated for their partnership work with the Education Department and CIPD. This project was designed to give year-12 students the experience of attending career industry panel discussions which provided
580 them with valuable insights and practical guidance on their career options.

Local industry professionals from 15 separate sectors including Health and Social Care, Law, Finance, Media and the Arts were brought together to create a dynamic learning environment that bridges the gap between academic knowledge and real-world applications. By engaging directly with industry leaders, students gained a deeper understanding of different career paths, the skills required and the opportunities available in their fields of interest.
585

We are also expanding our career development programme in collaboration with the Chief Secretary's office, Department of Employment, Department of Education and CIPD to reintroduce the careers fair to a younger demographic. The aim is to offer every young person a pathway into their chosen career and show them their options early on within their educational journey.

590 The service also host annual Youth Days to showcase our users' accomplishments and foster community engagement, such as recently organising a trip to Morocco made possible through the generous contributions of private donors. This initiative provided our members with the unique opportunity to explore beyond our borders, experiencing different cultures and lifestyles that they would not ordinarily have the chance to.

595 We are also in collaboration with the GFA to develop street football with the aim to foster not only physical health but also social, economic and cognitive development.

Madam Speaker, in November of 2023 I had the pleasure of creating the First Youth Symposium in Gibraltar with the aim of focusing on important issues relevant to young people. This provides them with a platform to share their experiences and have their voices heard with a view to shape policies and make change where necessary.
600

Since coming into Office in October 2023, we have had three successful meetings where we have heard what is important to them. In turn, our role has been to nurture their concerns,

provide guidance and or solutions, foster a sense of community and promote a positive impact on their lives.

605 It is with this in mind that we decided to launch the NEET project, for those 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' and The Zone, Step Up and Thrive projects within this. This is solely to focus on individuals typically between the ages of 16 and 24 who are not engaged in any form of work, educational pursuits, or vocational training.

610 This project has benefited from collaborative work between all my ministries: Employment, the Disability Office and Supported Employment, with further training avenues now more recently extended with our PATHS Programme. Youth Workers are licensed to deliver the 'Star Model' which is an evidence-based tool for measuring and supporting change when working with young people.

615 This programme is also offered to young people attending 'The Zone' to support their decision-making skills and help them grow and achieve. Since its inception, the Zone has met with 52 people seeking support over 20 sessions with many repeat clients, some attending up to three or four times based on their individual needs. The format of a session includes completing an initial inquiry form and reviewing an existing CV. I consider it our responsibility to intervene early, equipping these individuals with the tools necessary to lead a successful and meaningful life.

620 Madam Speaker, at the beginning of the year, in line with my vision and manifesto commitments, I engaged Senior Youth Worker, Ms Rebecca Figueras to develop a Youth Strategy targeting young people aged eight to 25 years. I have the pleasure of confirming that this has already been completed and we are in the final consultation phases in order to launch what will be a structured and comprehensive framework to address the needs, aspirations and challenges

625 faced by young people within our society.

The strategy will include empowerment opportunities, a holistic development of our young people to enhance their educational backgrounds, boost employability, well-being and overall health and fully equip them to face the challenges of their future. This strategy will undoubtedly contribute to them leading fulfilling lives.

630 The development process, which spanned from February to June, involved stakeholder engagement. It captured the voices of young people from the Youth Service as well as the Youth Symposium. In addition to gathering feedback from young people, the process involved stakeholder engagements with key departments and agencies that deliver both statutory and non-statutory services to the youth.

635 These included the Department of Education, the Care Agency and the Departments of Employment, Training, Equality and Disability. The aim was to explore cross overs in policy direction, how the strategy aligns with existing services and identify gaps where additional support or resources may be needed. The development of the Youth Strategy for Gibraltar represents a critical step towards ensuring that the voices of young people are heard and that their needs are

640 met in a comprehensive and meaningful way, reflective of their lived experiences and responsive to their aspirations. A document on the findings and framework will be released in the coming months.

645 Madam Speaker, the potential of our youth *cannot* be overstated. They hold the keys to a brighter, more innovative future and it is our responsibility to provide them with the tools, opportunities and support they need to thrive. From the fields of street football to the classrooms and beyond, we must foster environments that encourage growth, resilience and a global perspective.

650 In the words of Franklin Roosevelt, 'We cannot always build the future for our youth, but we can build our youth for the future'. And that is exactly what my intention is and will continue to be.

Another department within my remit which I am honoured to serve is that of Drugs and Alcohol Rehabilitation Services (DARS). Addiction is an issue that affects millions of lives across the globe and unfortunately here in Gibraltar too. In the past year we have seen a 40% increase in

admissions. Although some may see this as negative, it signals positive developments in
655 addressing substance abuse, promoting recovery and enhancing overall societal well-being.

It represents a shift towards a more compassionate and effective approach to addiction
treatment and support. The journey of recovery from drugs and alcohol addiction is not just a
medical or social issue, it is a deeply human one, touching families, communities and individuals
from all walks of life.

660 Our rehabilitation programmes play a crucial role in this journey. They provide not only medical
and psychological support but also a compassionate community that understands the
complexities of addiction. These programmes offer a beacon of hope, guiding individuals towards
a healthier, more fulfilling life.

In the past year we have completely revised policies and updated staff and client procedures,
665 implemented new timetables and restructured programme delivery. We have maximised
effective counsellor time within the residential in-house service, allocated clinical time, so
aftercare group sessions in the community continue and most importantly executed therapeutic
1-to-1 session for DARS clients in the community to be fully reinstated and operational.

The re-establishment of the Drugs Advisory Council has been welcomed by all and it is
670 imperative to have a multi-agency approach to achieve solutions to the problems our community
faces surrounding drugs in terms of education *and* rehabilitation.

We have also been able to secure and maintain community support, significant and beneficial
links with GHA, and we have developed a Drugs and Alcohol Services Pathway plan which focuses
on the importance of an inter-agency approach.

675 We have established a 'Dry House' within the community as a second stage process for clients
completing Bruce's Farm and re-entering the community. This is a flat with capacity for four
clients. Discussions are underway regarding a second dry house for female clients.

Community Therapeutic support continues both at HMP Windmill Hill and running Relapse
Prevention Group, Phoenix and Freedom Programmes. Post-Freedom monthly Support Group is
680 also being run. The Voice Programme has also already commenced.

Discussions have been held with the Gibraltar Youth Services Team in relation to younger DARS
clients aged between 18 years to 25 years, with emphasis on psycho-education and respite co-
work pertinent to younger clients integrating into community. The journey to recovery from drugs
and alcohol is one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, paths one can take.

685 At our rehabilitation service, we are committed to the support, resources and unwavering
belief in their ability to reclaim their lives. The battle against addiction is not fought alone, it
requires a collective effort from families and the community. With an environment of
understanding, support and education we can break the stigma surrounding addiction and
encourage more individuals to seek the help they need.

690 I now have the pleasure of moving on to another of my ministries which I am personally
invested in: Culture.

Madam Speaker, it seems like only yesterday we were at 'the Count' for the 2023 General
Elections held once again at the John Mackintosh Hall where Gibraltar Cultural Services staff
assisted Parliament with the arrangements. Following the elections I was delighted to have been
695 appointed Culture as one of my Ministries. Culture and the arts have been my life and my
livelihood so to be able to continue working with the great talent in this sector here in Gibraltar is
a real privilege.

Great work was done by my predecessor and friend, the Hon. Minister Cortes, I would like to
thank him for leaving me a very well-oiled machine with a lot of new initiatives that my team and
700 I will continue to work towards to ensure our cultural offering and its development, both locally
and abroad, remains at the heart of this Government's agenda.

Daily cultural activity and increased cultural services, our commitment to develop our arts at
an international level, our priority with cultural education, through residencies, exchanges and
courses are all examples of the work already earmarked for the new financial year by Gibraltar

705 Cultural Services, working as passionately and diligently as ever on behalf of my Ministry of Culture.

I am very proud of what has been achieved over the decades in this field. Our culture is the glue that holds our society together and is an imperative part of our cultural identity. Through events, cultural development and education, improvements and investment in cultural facilities and premises, I pledge that together with all stakeholders we will ensure culture continues to thrive and grow from strength to strength.

710 To this end, there have been myriad events organised this past year. The Calentita Festival returned in July 2023 held at both John Mackintosh Square and Campion Park and will be held again this Saturday, 5th July, so I hope to see everyone here attending this Saturday.

715 This festival is a family event aimed at showcasing our varied gastronomy from our traditional dishes to newer cuisines which have also been adopted into our culture. This event is the kind of tourism-led event we are working on promoting to attract more visitors to Gibraltar.

Events such as this, the Festival of Lights, the cavalcade and concerts are the types of offerings which put The Rock on the map internationally both culturally and for tourism. GCS assisted the Ministry of Tourism by providing staffing and logistics support at last year's Gibraltar International Literary Festival. GCS also organised a very successful Gibraltar Literature Week in November 2023 where they provided a fitting platform to local authors.

720 The week included 'An Audience With', Lightning Talks, and a Poetry and Music theatre event highlighting our *Llanito* flair. Offerings were further opened to the public with a writing workshop by Jonathan Pizarro, a playwriting workshop by Louis Emmitt-Stern given to school children, press writeups, interviews and more.

730 The '*Trovadores and Poets*' event was a new concept devised as part of the week to promote the written work through poetry and music promoting our *Llanito* voice. We are very grateful to all our local authors for their support. To celebrate the best of Gibraltar's arts and culture the 5th Cultural Awards was held at the Sunborn Hotel on 29th November and aired live on GBC. The Awards highlight the potential, ability, talent and achievements of the cultural community who work on behalf of us all and for our collective entertainment.

735 Madam Speaker, the Christmas season is a busy time in our cultural calendar. The Christmas Wonderland held in November moved to Casemates Square fulfilling our manifesto commitment to make it bigger and better than ever. Six thousand people attended the Festival of Lights and 2,000 people attended the Christmas Party. The two-day event provided entertainment by local cultural groups and the hugely popular international act Boney M. The Christmas attractions at John Mackintosh Square entertained younger members of our community for over six weeks. In conjunction to all this, the late-night shopping in Town attracted many visitors and supported our business community.

740 Business was also enhanced by the two Christmas Saturdays held in Town, with entertainment including marching bands, dance groups, rock bands and choirs. The festive season was brought to a close by the return of the New Year's celebrations at Casemates Square, produced on our behalf by *Gibmedia*. This and the Three Kings Cavalcade are both highlights of our social and cultural calendars and thousands of people of all ages, from Gibraltar and further afield, enjoyed the spectacles.

745 Although our backing of the cavalcade was questioned in Parliament, the Chief Minister reiterated our unwavering support for this offering and a publication of a letter by the Cavalcade Committee refuted any hint of dissatisfaction. I would like to thank the committee for their sterling work to make sure this annual event continues to be one of the highlights for our local community.

750 And 2024 also started strong with the 9th edition of the ever-popular GibTalks, organised in collaboration with Julian Felice, and giving an insight into the lived experiences of many varied interesting speakers.

755 For the younger cohort and as part of the Youth Arts Jamboree, the Festival for Young Musicians organised by GAMPA was held at the John Mackintosh Hall Theatre giving a platform for musicians from Gibraltar and abroad to show off their talent.

760 Still on our young people, the Young Art Competitive Exhibition displayed the potential and achievements of the younger generation and World Book Day was celebrated and attended by school children. Based on the books of popular children's authors, this day is designed to encourage our youth to enjoy literature. The Jamboree is part of our ongoing cultural drive to encourage young people to be the cultural leaders of tomorrow.

765 Over two thousand upper primary and secondary school students were introduced to classic theatre with a twist. The Young Shakespeare Company returned to Gibraltar in May 2024 with several performances of Shakespeare's *'Henry V'*. A huge thanks to the John Mackintosh Trust, for their support with this event.

Acting for all ages was encouraged with the annual Gibraltar International Drama Festival, in its 67th edition. This is the highlight of theatre goers in Gibraltar year on year and as a seasoned contributor, a personal highlight for me, too.

770 Madam Speaker, the lasting impact of John Mackintosh was highlighted and commemorated on the 60th Anniversary of the John Mackintosh Hall with an art exhibition, a writing workshop by Gabriel Moreno promoting memories of the cultural centre, and a talk by Richard Garcia on the man himself and his legacy. Thanks to his belief and support in the arts, so many generations have had access to this space to continue learning and creating.

775 One of the highlights of the summer was the return of Melon Diesel who celebrated the 25th anniversary of their album *'La Cuesta de Mister Bond'* with a performance to 2,000 people at the Europa Sports indoor complex. This event was produced at no cost to the Government and had a great reach to fans from Gibraltar and from Spain, where this local export found fame and success obtaining a platinum record and two gold records over their career.

780 On behalf of the Ministry, GCS has also run its annual programme of events and festivals, to include the Autumn and Spring events, international art competitions, the ever-popular Gibraltar Fair and National Day events, Worker's Memorial Day and Classical Concerts.

785 Madam Speaker, GCS also focus on cultural development and education. We supported the Guernsey Island Games cultural programme with writers and artist participation, resulting in works selected for the *'Pocket Island Poetry Open'* publication amongst other competing nations.

Gibraltar was represented at the Cambridge University Symposium 2023 which focused on *'Llanito, Culture and Writing'*. Gibraltarian authors and international academics focused on language use, literary expression and other aspects of our Gibraltarian identity.

790 As Minister for Culture I want to continue this emphasis on our unique language. Participation at the Malta Book Fair 2023 allowed GCS to share ideas and best practices with our Maltese counterparts on how to support local writers in editing, publishing and distribution. We have also supported a linguistic research project from the University of Seville with promotion and activities in Gibraltar.

795 The continued Cultural Exchange with Morocco saw the launch of *'Isthmus'* an art exhibition showcasing three artists from Morocco organised in conjunction with the JM Memorial Foundation and Gallery Kent in Tangier. This was an opportunity to highlight all the work done to promote cultural and artistic links with Tangier over the last few years.

800 World Book Day 2024 attracted hundreds of students to the John Mackintosh Hall to celebrate the books of David Walliams. Storytelling, art activities and performances, that gave the children a fun yet educational day. The John Mackintosh Library is continually promoted with school visits and tours and pupils are actively encouraged to become members. Our support of local authors continued with participation at the London Book Fair which was a milestone event.

805 Representation from Gibraltar's authors illustrators and academics gave us the opportunity to network and explore literary opportunities. We presented our cultural heritage and literary voice to a global audience. Our younger authors from Young Enterprise, *Tiny Minds*, were helped with

their *Llanito* publication '*¡Vamonos! Let's Go*'. We want to encourage the love of reading and writing at a young age. We also supported the 'The BookClub' TV programme produced by GBC.

810 Madam Speaker, our support for all things cultural have seen us involved in varied projects to include a Maria Callas experimental film by Nina Danino where a special screening took place at the Inces Hall, starting a Silent Book Club at BookGem and the launch of a Culture Crawl where the Llanito Dr Ryan Asquez led enthusiasts on a walk promoting history, heritage and culture through Street Art.

Apart from literature, supporting art is also big on my agenda. The new look GEMA Gallery logo was borne from a competition which attracted 80 entries from 36 participants.

815 A pop-up exhibition at the John Mackintosh Hall featured the Sky Arts Landscape Portrait Artist of the Year, Monica Popham. We are very proud of Monica's accomplishments, she has been a staple of the local art scene since a very young age and deserves all the international recognition.

I must also mention Shane Dalmedo, whose sculpture 'Sunday Drive' was selected from thousands of entries as one of the exhibits for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.

820 I cannot emphasise how important it is to me to ensure we continue nurturing our artists and creatives. To do this we have to educate and expose our young people to art. The fun and educational tours of the Mario Finlayson National Art Gallery show off our art heritage, GEMA gallery promotes modern art, and the Street Art tours continue to put art on show in the context of its surroundings and outside the more conventional exhibition settings.

825 The Street Art murals across Gibraltar continue to be refurbished and street Art Walks are a popular tour with schools and for tourists, promoted on buytickets.gi. Marketing and promotion of all events and offerings are at the heart of our activities, using varied social media and more traditional press outlets.

GCS also continues to work with the Gibraltar Tourist Board to run a 'Visit Gibraltar' campaign of our national contemporary galleries. The historic and interesting City Hall has hosted school visits and international groups from Spain and Morocco visiting through the Mayor's Office. And I must say, I pride myself in being the catalyst to bring weddings to the City Hall. This building offers a picturesque backdrop to ceremonies for residents and visitors alike who can immerse themselves in the art and history of their surroundings on their special day.

835 Madam Speaker, GCS also collaborates with the Ministry for Sport in its Summer and mid-term sports and leisure programme providing cultural initiatives and opportunities for these events. This year we will once again be supporting 'The Mindspace Project' in its cultural summer programme. GCS also runs and administers the Cultural Organisations Register which is a live document and is continually updated, in line with the Child Protection policy. Safeguarding Children courses are given to all the relevant groups and individuals as required.

The following of best practices and legislation is at the fore of all things cultural with my commitment to provide a more efficient service. The new Cultural Act will be brought to Parliament in the coming weeks and will make provision for the management, enhancement and enjoyment of culture in Gibraltar and will provide for all other connected cultural matters.

845 My team are also working on a new Entertainments Act which will clarify processes and streamline policies for users and members of the public.

Madam Speaker, GCS are the proud custodians of the Government's Art Collection on behalf of the Ministry of Culture. Over the last year we have acquired 54 artworks at a total of £52,244. This collection is added to discerningly, with each piece contributing to a one-of-a-kind compilation of Gibraltar's artistic story, both historic and contemporary.

850 On the subject of collections, I must now mention the ever-popular John Mackintosh Hall Library, still Gibraltar's only public-lending library. Membership is steadily growing, now standing at 6,212 members with a total of 455 new members joining between September 2023 and April 2024.

855 BorrowBox, the platform for the loaning of eBooks and Audiobooks is also continually increasing with registered members standing at 784. Library tours and weekly storytelling continue to be subscribed. I wish to thank our committed group of volunteer storytellers who are

there week after week. The collection of books written by Gibraltarian authors on themes related to Gibraltar is also being added to.

860 With the continued expert management by GCS and support by the public, the Library, part of John Mackintosh's legacy, will continue to grow from strength to strength. All of our cultural facilities need to be refurbished and maintained in order to support our cultural entities, groups and individuals. t

865 A total of £325,609 has been spent on the Central Hall, Inces Hall, John Mackintosh Hall, the Gustavo Bacarisas and GEMA Galleries and the City Hall. The upkeep and enhancement of these venues is an investment, not just in our arts, but in our community. Part of this enhancement is improving accessibility so our spaces are inclusive for all members of our community.

As Minister for Equality this is paramount to my Ministry and me.

870 On behalf of the Ministry of Culture, GCS continue to make significant progress in the maintenance of all Government premises and estates. Some major and minor works have taken place at several locations with an investment of £125,339.

The work done by GCS is of immense quality and value. Community cultural events are very much publicised. The work done behind the scenes to drive our culture into the future is less known. I hope my report here today puts the day-to-day efforts in the spotlight.

875 For the next financial year, in addition to our annual calendar of events we plan to continue promoting our Llanito language with attendance at the University of Vigo's next symposium. A new cultural TV programme in conjunction with GBC, based on Llanito and our unique expression, is expected to air later this year.

880 The 6th Cultural Awards will be held at the Sunborn Hotel in November to continue celebrating our creatives, and as testament to our commitment to have a varied programme for all niches and tastes December will see the return of the Magic Festival, which has not been staged in Gibraltar for nearly five years.

885 My Ministry, supported as ever by GCS will continue with the key development plans for Culture as part of our Manifesto. These include the recent reinstatement of the Gibraltar Arts Advisory Council. This is of immense importance as the members are well placed and understand the priorities that we need to be addressing.

890 Over the next four years my team will be working on the creation of or enhancement of cultural premises. We will introduce a new subsidy for performers as part of a new Elite Funding programme which will help young people with funding in approved schools and academies for specific courses.

Madam Speaker, I am sure that all the above will appear quite ambitious, but with the support of my colleagues here today, my teams and my ministries and the community, these will all become reality.

895 Madam Speaker, as part of my portfolio I am also Minister for Commercial Aviation and the Gibraltar Air Terminal. Today I would like to proudly present the improvements we have achieved throughout the last year which has had a particular focus on the continued development and enhancement of Gibraltar's air terminal. Our air terminal is not only a vital gateway for tourism and business but also a crucial element in our efforts to establish Gibraltar as a regional hub for aviation and commerce.

900 We are privileged to have this facility within our small grounds which plays an indispensable role in our economy. It facilitates the movement of thousands of passengers annually, connecting our community to the wider world and supporting local businesses. This current year I am happy to report we have seen an increase of 5.5% in aircraft movements in comparison to 2023. This is particularly due to non-scheduled flights coming into Gibraltar by private aircraft.

905 Madam Speaker, we have seen the *highest* annual recorded amount since the new Air Terminal came into operation, with 488 movements throughout 2023. The first quarter of 2024 is showing similar traffic levels, so it appears that this increasing trend will continue. During the coming summer months, we already have 32 weekly flights and this equates to approximately four to five flights per day.

910 Winter flights are already on sale by the airlines and although the final version of the flight schedule will still need confirmation over the next few months, the initial programme shows similar frequencies and the same destinations as last winter, so no major changes are expected yet.

Investing in the renewal of airside equipment for Handling Agents offers several specific advantages that support the broader benefits of increasing aircraft movement in Gibraltar.

915 Here are the key benefits: within this we have in the past year invested in the renewal of airside equipment for the Handling Agents as some of these were getting to their end of life or needed replacing. Four pieces of equipment were procured which will greatly assist operations and improve efficiency: 1xDiesel Pushback Truck, 1xElectric Tractor, as well as 2XAviramp.

920 Our Government has also invested in four extra explosive trace detectors to cope with the increased demand in security and safety applications to detect minute traces of explosive materials, and these are already in place and in use.

We have also improved and replaced the paving airside and landslide, and seen a major upgrade to the airside catering concession being carried out by the current occupier. We have had maintenance works to the whole of the roof and seen major refurbishment to the chiller units, this being the equipment that cools the air that then circulates through the building.

925 Search ratios, critical in evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of search efforts were increased on 1st June 2024 in line with the UK and with the view of remaining compliant with the Regulations in place and passengers will experience a higher incidence of these.

930 With regard to staffing, our Air Terminal have continued maintaining their competencies and qualifications to ensure that everyone is compliant with the different regulations. An Air Terminal internal training event was carried out in March which focused on the Air Terminal response to Gibraltar Airport Emergency Orders, where the current procedures were tested and will be reviewed with any findings.

935 To conclude on this aspect of my portfolio, I will highlight the significant advancements we have undertaken and the vital role these improvements play within our nation. We have invested, as mentioned, in state-of-the-art Aviramps, ensuring step-free, obstacle-free access for *all* passengers. These innovations are more than just enhancements; they are commitments to inclusivity and convenience, making travel accessible and comfortable for everyone.

940 Moreover, our ongoing efforts to procure next generation Security Screening Equipment underscore our dedication to safety and efficiency. These technological advancements will not only streamline our security processes but also bring our screening standards to the forefront, matching the highest international benchmarks for hold-baggage screening.

945 These improvements are not just about keeping pace with technological advancements, they are about setting new standards in passenger experience, safety and operational efficiency. Our air terminal is a gateway not just to destinations, but to possibilities. It represents our dedication to progress, safety and the highest level of service for all who pass through its doors.

I now turn to my responsibilities and I am sure you are glad to hear my last portfolio, Tourism.

950 Madam Speaker, the cruise industry significantly contributes to our economy with increased activity in retail shops and hospitality outlets. As she has already mentioned, I am working together with my colleague and friend the Minister for the Port, the Hon Gemma Arias-Vasquez on a new cruise terminal and port master plan to ensure that our port, one of our main entry points, can work cohesively for everyone's benefit.

955 Beyond the immediate impact, the cruising industry generates revenue for various tourist sites and benefits both direct and peripheral suppliers. Sustained growth in this sector requires constant engagement and keeping abreast of new trends and concepts within the industry.

In 2023 we saw 168 cruise calls and this year we are set to increase cruise calls by 12% to 188 cruise calls. Although these figures are prone to fluctuate, we should see a further increase of 25% to 233 cruise calls already booked for 2025, going well above 2019's 197 cruise calls.

960 These numbers need to be attributed to the great work done by my predecessor the Honourable Vijay Daryanani who worked tirelessly promoting the cruising sector.

Madam Speaker, sustainability is an essential part of the cruise industry at present. The Gibraltar Port is now, as already mentioned, able to conduct LNG bunkering which enables us to cater to the new ships that have this capability and is a catalyst to attract new vessels. We also
965 provide Biofuels bringing alternative fuels to the forefront of the sustainability direction of cruise companies.

Madam Speaker, we have had the pleasure of hosting exclusive networking dinners with top level cruise executives, and the first in the year was in May 2023 at the Cruise Line International Association (CLIA), their event in Southampton.

970 We held another of these events in November whilst at the World Travel Market in London where we co-hosted a dinner with Travel Weekly, the most influential B2B travel source in the industry. I was delighted to have the opportunity to share the Gibraltar Tourist Board's vision for Gibraltar's product with such a distinguished audience such as the President of Carnival UK, the President of Cunard and senior representatives from P&O Cruises and other leading cruise
975 agencies.

These two events were a productive way to connect with high-level industry leaders. It is important to engage with all levels of cruise organisations to ensure Gibraltar is kept at the forefront of the cruising industry.

980 The Gibraltar Tourist Board attended two events providing networking opportunities with the more Med-centric side of the cruise business: the Med-cruise general assembly event in Corfu in May 2023 and Seatrade Europe in Hamburg, as an exhibitor. We remain committed to invest in this type of event creating visibility for our destination and cementing our position as an important cruise centre in the Mediterranean.

985 The Gibraltar Tourist Board team attended the CLIA destination showcase cruise conference in Porto in October. It was an opportunity to network and showcase Gibraltar as a cruise destination to UK Travel Agents. Madam Speaker, in April this year I attended the prestigious Seatrade Global in Miami together with the CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board.

990 This is a key show in the global cruising market with all the major cruise companies attending. We were able to have a number of very fruitful meetings and networking opportunities. We have seen an increase in port calls for Gibraltar for 2024 and 2025 and we will continue to work hard to push this sector further.

995 Madam Speaker, we co-hosted, together with Virgin Atlantic, an exclusive dinner in Southampton to yet another set of top level executives in May 2024 which included the likes of Royal Caribbean, Marella Cruises, Azamara Cruises, P&O, Celebrity Cruises and Norwegian, just to name a few. The attendee list was an impressive 'Who's who' of very senior members of the key cruise liners globally. It is not often that you get such high calibre executives in one room, and it is *excellent* exposure for Gibraltar.

1000 It was also a great opportunity to invite them all to Gibraltar this coming September as Gibraltar has been selected as the host country for the prestigious CLIA Destination showcase in September 2024. Holding this event in Gibraltar is a milestone. Around 80 of the top cruise agents and executives will be attending.

1005 Madam Speaker, the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions segment (or MICE) as it's generally known, is a sector we are actively pursuing by positioning Gibraltar as an attractive hub for this market. In our continued and developing strategy to attract the MICE sector to the destination, the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended various events last summer including the M&I Planner event in Limassol together with the Sunborn Hotel. This is an event to network with a whole range of MICE buyers from both UK and Europe and a total of 42 back-to-back meetings were held during the course of the two-day event. We returned again this January in Marrakech.

1010 The Gibraltar Tourist Board also attended 'The Meetings Show' in London, the largest MICE event in the UK with over 1,200 buyers attending. Key to the show's attraction for Gibraltar is that 97% of buyers are UK based. It is through participation at the Meetings Show that the GTB was able to meet the Business Travel Association (BTA), whose members are responsible for 95% of corporate travel in the UK.

1015 We are honoured to have been selected as the host country for their overseas conference in
Gibraltar also this coming September. So we have a very busy September coming up on the
tourism front. It is a great opportunity to proposition what Gibraltar can offer to this important
and lucrative sector of the corporate tourism landscape. We also attended the MICEBOOK
conference in January 2024, in London together with the Sunborn Hotel – this was the first time
attending this MICE event in order to evaluate its benefits.

1020 Madam Speaker, the short-term let accommodation sector has been growing exponentially
during the past few years in the global scene, and this includes in Gibraltar where from June to
May 2022 to 2023 figures are up by a substantial 24%. This sector is a substantive issue facing
most jurisdictions internationally and regionally and at different levels, and there is no standard
global framework to be guided by. Every place is slightly different, and most regions are
1025 implementing their own initiatives commensurate with the issues they are facing. While these
short-term rental accommodations play a vital role in the tourism accommodation ecosystem,
contributing to economic activity, there is an imperative need for regulation in this domain.

Madam Speaker, we are in the final stages of implementing this piece of legislation which will
provide much-needed clarity and serve to legitimise the accommodation on offer in this sector.
1030 Madam Speaker as with all other fronts in the tourism landscape, the Gibraltar Tourist Board will
continue to engage with the travel industry, building relationships and pushing the Gibraltar
agenda forward.

In June 2023 the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended the ITT Travel (Institute of Travel Tourism)
conference in Qatar, attended by more than 200 senior representatives from the UK travel
1035 industry, ranging from government bureaus to world-renowned airlines.

In September 2023 we attended the Global Travel Marketplace in London where the CEO
Mr Kevin Bossino delivered a presentation on sustainable travel and was also part of a panel
discussion together with senior representatives of the tourist boards of Italy, France and Portugal.
The Global Travel Marketplace (GTM) is an appointment-only event that aims to connect top-
1040 producing travel advisors with global travel suppliers.

This was followed by the Future of Travel conference in which we hosted a lunch at a
prestigious Travel Weekly event in the Google London offices. The CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist
Board delivered an address to members which included high-level executives of the Travel
Industry in London. This event is attended by executives of the whole spectrum of the travel
1045 industry including: Airlines, Cruise Lines, Travel Advisers, Travel Agents, consortiums, Media,
Online Travel Agencies including Google itself.

In November 2023, I attended the World Travel Market (WTM) in London together with my
team. This was my first time at the event and it was important to see how the event operated.
WTM is considered to be one of the most influential travel and tourism events globally with over
1050 40,000 travel professionals from 184 countries attending the event. It is crucial for Gibraltar as a
destination to be represented to showcase what we have to offer.

In terms of cross-border tourism, we have engaged with the overland tour operators and have
embarked on a marketing initiative on the TUI buses to promote awareness and visits. Every TUI
customer that arrives to Costa del Sol and Costa de la Luz will see the Gibraltar Tour adverts during
1055 their transfer and other excursions. In addition, we will continue to promote Gibraltar including
any events and targeting these areas in particular.

On the subject of buses and overland travel, coach arrivals statistics are proving positive, with
the first quarter of 2024 up by 18.5% from the first quarter of 2023. Land frontier visitor arrivals
are up by 14.1% from 2022 to 2023, signalling growth in this coming year.

1060 Madam Speaker, the compact nature of our destination lends itself to the pursuit of special
interest groups or niche markets. At the start of 2024 the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended the
BOOT conference in Dusseldorf, one of the largest yacht and water sports shows globally. With
214,000 visitors from 120 countries, it included representatives from the yachting world, marinas,
water sports and scuba diving.

1065 It was Gibraltar's first time attending this show to ascertain potential value in the future. Scuba
diving is a particular example of a special interest group with great potential which we are focusing
on. Divers are constantly searching for new destinations and although competition is tough,
Gibraltar has a superb scuba-diving environment. With 35 wrecks and reefs to explore and an
abundance of marine life, it is an opportunity to position Gibraltar as the *perfect* diving
1070 destination.

Due to this In March 2024 we attended the UK Dive Show in Coventry together with Dive
Charter's dive centre group. This show is the UK's largest dive event and it was an opportunity to
target dive Tour Operators, travel agents, consumers directly and to connect with Dive Centres.
The UK is Gibraltar's key feeder market for this niche sport, and it is highly beneficial to have a
1075 presence at this type of event. We made contact with one of the main dive agents and invited
them for a familiarisation trip where she was able to absorb the diving scene in Gibraltar.

We have recently launched Gibraltar as a diving destination via the DiveWorldwide website
offering packages for five-day trips to Gibraltar which I am convinced will be a success.

1080 Madam Speaker, the wedding sector is another of the niche markets we want to pursue
further. Gibraltar is one of the most accessible and hassle-free global locations for couples to
legally solemnise their union. The introduction of same sex marriage legislation in December 2016
has also paved the way for LBGQTQ+ couples to benefit from this, increasing the numbers of
potential weddings.

1085 Madame Speaker, our colleagues at the CSRO, working together with the Ministry of Culture
are now, as already mentioned, using the City Hall as the main marriage registry. As part of this
niche tourism strategy, in March the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended a Weddings & Honeymoons
dinner awards event in London together with the CSRO and the Sunborn Hotel. The marketing
initiative with the magazine included a video interview which allowed me to promote the virtues
of weddings in Gibraltar on all their digital channels.

1090 Sporting events have also played a pivotal role in our event-led tourism strategy. The versatility
of our locale allows for the hosting of various sports, presenting a valuable opportunity to
consistently contribute to our overnight stay system through a diverse range of events. By actively
engaging with sports groups both locally and internationally, we can cultivate a steady stream of
events, enhancing the appeal of our destination promoting a dynamic atmosphere for both
1095 participants and spectators alike.

We once again supported the Rugby 7s event which drew a huge crowd of international
visitors. This is a good example of our tourism-led event strategy and unique in that it merges
sports and finance.

1100 Madam Speaker, as traditionally is the case, in November we held the Gibunco Gibraltar
International Literary Festival which was *hugely* successful. I would like to thank the Gibunco
Group for their continued support as key sponsors of this event.

1105 This event saw very high-level personalities such as former UK Prime Minister Theresa May,
Dame Mary Berry and Esme Young as well as other politicians, historians, children and other
authors from a good variety of fields. We were also graced by the presence of the patron of the
Literary Festival, HRH Princess Anne.

1110 Earlier in the year HRH had kindly agreed to continue her patronage for a further three years.
We will continue to host this event, but given its success this year it will be a week-long event
working closely with GCS and the Ministry of Culture. This year our local talent will present
alongside international authors. Other than placing Gibraltar firmly on the map in terms of
literature, it serves to promote the Rock to an influential and international audience.

As the event includes an educational school programme, our students are also engaged and
exposed to varied literary talent.

1115 It is our commitment to increase our air connectivity so the Gibraltar Tourist Board attended
the CONNECT Turin conference in February which is an Airline Route Development forum. The
event hosted 800 participants and 80 airlines. The face-to-face meetings with key personnel from
existing airline partners and potential new airlines afforded great networking opportunities.

Just this past June we attended a dinner in London with top executives of EasyJet, including their CEO. This was a great opportunity to continue building on the great relationship we already enjoy with the airline.

1120 Airport statistics show scheduled flights were up by 2.6% in 2023 vs 2022. Passenger arrivals and departures by air increased 6.2% in the same period. We want to continue this momentum.

In our endeavour to continue to engage with the UK press, part of our strategy is to enhance awareness with familiarisation trips from the UK. In April 2023 we hosted a press trip which resulted in really positive articles by the Mail on Sunday and the Daily Mail Scotland. Following
1125 this we attended the TravMedia/IMM event in London, where we held 36 back-to-back meetings with influencers and members of the British travel media.

This was a great opportunity to promote awareness of Gibraltar and to make contacts for potential future familiarisation trips.

1130 Madam Speaker, at the beginning of the year we focused on a rebrand of Visit Gibraltar and this culminated with a launch on 4th April 2024. The rebrand goes beyond the change of logo which now features Gibraltar's rich history, diverse culture, the iconic Rock and impressive Nature Reserve. The rebrand shines a spotlight on Gibraltar's hidden beauties, its lesser known but equally significant venues and highlighting the unique value of Gibraltar's heritage and culture while celebrating our British identity with our Mediterranean lifestyle.

1135 Parallel to the rebrand, a Tourism Strategy 2024-2030 blueprint was developed in order to provide a roadmap and focus for the next few years. This is a working document which will be amended as and when circumstances change.

Madam Speaker, we also launched our new website which is more user friendly and up to date. We have also introduced an interesting initiative whereby 3D scans of some of our tourist sites
1140 have been developed and posted on our website. These will serve a dual purpose.

Visitors, such as a wedding couples deciding on their wedding venue, can now view City Hall for example. It will also enable visitors to experience restricted sites such as Gorham's Cave which only allows 150 physical visitors annually.

1145 We have also scanned the Eisenhower bunker which is located in a data centre, as well as the Garrison Library. Visitors will be able to experience these sites in an immersive way by accessing the 3D scan which will also provide links to interesting facts and information. We will be looking at introducing more sites in the future.

As part of enhancing our accessibility programme we have developed BSL QR codes linked to videos for some of our key sights as well as the airport. They are included in the Visit Gibraltar
1150 website and will be included on the sites themselves.

In order to further enhance our visitor experience we have introduced a Smart Guide app for people wanting to make their own way around Gibraltar. Our view is to celebrate our unique identity and with this in mind we are also featuring our very own *Llanito* doctor with short clips on bespoke and interesting aspects of our historical sites.

1155 In addition, we are in progress of introducing Macaque educational videos which will give people an entirely new insight into the interesting, behavioural aspects of our undoubtedly top tourist attraction. The intention is that these initiatives will enhance engagement of the website.

Madam Speaker, we have embarked on a marketing campaign in the UK, including television adverts, newspaper ads both in print and online, and radio commercials as well as an expanded
1160 social media campaign. We are showcasing Gibraltar in a different light, with fresh new footage and photography which seeks to showcase the experiential and emotive side of life in Gibraltar.

As part of our marketing drive we are introducing what is generally known as 'Instagrammable areas' to entice people to take pictures and tag us in their social media. This is a free form of marketing and very much in line with today's 'selfie' habits. For example, we have introduced a
1165 'Kiss Me' sign at Europa Point and this is proving to be extremely popular, more popular than we could ever have thought. Very popular with all demographics of tourists. We will continue to develop similar ideas, such as selfie stands, in other interesting locations.

1170 In April I attended the TravMedia Awards in London together with the CEO of the Gibraltar Tourist Board, Mr Kevin Bossino and Ms Tracey Poggio from Gibraltar Tourist Board London office. This event recognises outstanding achievements in travel journalism and 24 winners were celebrated.

Visit Gibraltar sponsored the Diversity Champion of the Year Award, which was a new prize introduced. Exposure at this event was priceless with all top travel media, influencers, journalists and PR professionals from the UK in attendance.

1175 Madam Speaker, in our efforts to increase the visitor experience, the Gibraltar Tourist Board, spearheaded by Ms Suyenne Perez Catania, embarked on a programme to refresh our tour licence guide certifications to ensure that anyone offering tours have an up-to-date certification. This is crucial to ensure that we maintain the standard and quality of tours offered.

1180 A tailor-made course for the Licence Guide Badge, including a customer care section, has been offered to A-level students studying Travel and Tourism at the Gibraltar College. The course covers a wide variety of topics and gives students the opportunity of obtaining an extra qualification which will benefit them when working within the tourism industry.

1185 Madam Speaker, we will continue to work with both our colleagues in the public sector and the private sector, to enhance the tourism experience and what is on offer in Gibraltar. There are a number of key ongoing projects such as the enhancement of the World War II tunnel experience, the introduction of a completely new and interesting tourist attraction with the Hollow Rock project in Devil's Tower Road, the amazing Northern Defences project already announced by my Colleague the Deputy Chief Minister, and the Mount to name a few.

1190 The Upper Rock Nature Reserve continues to be one of our most popular selling points. Minister Cortes went through the figures during his speech so I will not go through them in detail. But a reminder that visitors increased by 30% from 2022 and 2023 showing tourist interest in this area. The first quarter of 2024 has seen an increase of 25% so we are confident we may reach pre-pandemic figures by the end of the year – fingers crossed. We will continue to promote this and all our other sites.

1195 We cannot and will *not* sit still, we are *passionate* about our tourism industry and will strive to push our agenda forward with energy and ambition. Gibraltar deserves to be recognised as a top tourist destination.

1200 I do not know whether the Members Opposite may try to put a damper on our marketing efforts or not, and even our product; however there is no denying that we are fortunate to live in the jewel of the Mediterranean and the upward statistics prove that what we are doing is working.

Madam Speaker, I am sure you will be pleased to hear I am approaching the end of my first Budget Speech. I hope I have not bored you. And I must say this is my longest soliloquy I have ever delivered (*Interjection*) and I know it has been long! I must say I have enjoyed myself.

1205 It has been my absolute pleasure to be able to recount everything my Ministries have done and are committed to do in the future. I have a great team of people working in my Ministries and relevant departments. I hope they realise that I could not do any of this work without them.

1210 I thank my team at Employment led by Debbie Garcia; my team at GCS led by Seamus Byrne; my team at the GTB led by Kevin Bossino; my team at the Youth Service led by Mark Zammit; my team at Training led by Dylan Podesta; my team at the Gibraltar Airport led by Terence Lopez; my team at Bruces' Farm led by Carlos Banderas; my team at the SNDO led by Jenny Victory; and finally my team in Equality and my Ministry led by April Smart Devincenzi.

1215 Some I may see every day, others not as often, but I know they are all just as invested as I am in making all our ideas, initiatives and policies work and come to fruition for the good of our community. Thanks to all of them, but a special thank you to Monica Stevens and Nicole Cartwright who have the interesting task of dealing with me and sorting my life out on a daily basis.

Madam Speaker, I would like to end by thanking you and the parliament team and all my parliamentary colleagues for listening so patiently today and for your continued support in the discharge of my functions as a Member of this House and my attendant ministerial responsibilities.

1220 Thank you very much. (*Banging on desks*)

Adjournment

1225 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Madam Speaker, after that remarkable performance can I invite the House to take a recess of 20 minutes and return at five o'clock.

Madam Speaker: We will recess for 20 minutes.

The House recessed at 4.40 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.00 p.m.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. A Sanchez.

1230 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I rise today to deliver my first Budget address. It is with great honour that I do so, and I take this opportunity to once again thank the people of Gibraltar for this great privilege.

1235 As I rise, I look around to see four women MPs in this Parliament. While this represents progress in representation from the past, our Parliament still ranks below global, and most certainly European averages, in terms of representing women and minorities. I am not prepared to participate in self-congratulatory fanfare on this issue for the sake of my party or any other party.

Madam Speaker, this is not good enough and it is with this that I say collectively we must do better. Yes, I firmly agree that women should not be used as mere photo opportunities. However, this is not what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition said. And the hon. Lady knows that.

1240 The hon. Gentleman did not refer to her UN visit. His comment was about photo opportunities of all candidates. In any event, Madam Speaker, it is unclear how his comment could be taken to mean anything derogatory about women. Misrepresenting the facts in this way does a disservice to the Hon. Minister and indeed to all women. I repeat: collectively, we must do better.

1245 Madam Speaker, the theme of every Budget debate in this House for over 10 years has been whether the Government is borrowing too much money and whether, as a consequence, it is putting the future of our children and our children's children at risk. There might have been a doubt in 2014 as to whether the GSD Opposition was right in this criticism of the Government. But today, in 2024, there is no doubt that we were right and they were not.

1250 The majority of the people in the community today, in 2024, accept that the Government's handling of the public finances has been a total car crash and that the discourse of the Chief Minister, in particular, on this issue, is not one that you would expect from a leader that is politically honest. Madam Speaker, the extraordinarily comprehensive speeches of my friends, the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Mr Clinton demonstrate that.

1255 A subsidiary but related issue, of course, to their management of public finances (*Interjection*) has been the Government's record on accountability and transparency. The Opposition's central complaint has been that they have been unable to hold the Government to account because this is a Government that has structured its finances behind an impenetrable web of companies or that it simply chooses to close the shutters on Opposition questions when they become too awkward for them. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

1260 Yes, we have more parliamentary sessions, but what is the point of that if we on this side of the House are not given the information we need to properly do our jobs on behalf of the people we serve?

Madam Speaker, the public outcry against the Budget measures has been widespread, dominating our screens, our phones and the streets of Gibraltar. There is no escaping it.

1265 The disconnect between this Government and most of our community is astounding. It is unsurprising that the people feel dissatisfied with this Government, when what they experience and what they hear from them does not match up.

The numbers, the estimates, the promises are way too rosy for the difficult reality that people feel on the ground. And when so many people are genuinely worried that Gibraltar is becoming a place for the rich, a place that they no longer recognise; and that those who need the support of the Government the most are neither represented nor reflected, many may argue that they are no longer the socialist party that they claim to be. Many may argue that they, Madam Speaker, are champagne socialists at best. (*Interjections*)

1275 This disconnect is alarmingly palpable but we do not have to say it, the people said it loud and clear on the day of the Hon. Chief Minister's Budget address. They chanted 'Fuera Picardo' outside No. 6 Convent Place; and his promised, but never delivered, glorious 'New Dawn', Madam Speaker, was nowhere to be found.

1280 No, I am not an economist or an accountant or a lawyer, but I do meet many constituents and the feedback that I get is that people do not trust politicians and their promises. This may reflect a more general international trend, too, where people feel disconnected and disenfranchised; where trust in long-standing institutions has been eroded; and where the system feels too many as being unfair.

1285 This is a dangerous breeding ground for populist anti-establishment narratives that undermine institutions and democracy. And the gaslighting that we have seen from this Government and the Chief Minister, in particular, does not help us locally. Because every time the Chief Minister acts in this House like a playground bully, using his right of reply to denigrate his opponents, trust in all of us is collectively affected.

1290 The Hon. the Chief Minister may have adopted a rather sanctimonious tone during his Budget address, pretending otherwise; but, Madam Speaker, after 13 years people have repeatedly witnessed this behaviour and have grown tired of it. No doubt he will do it again in this session in his right of reply because he acts, with respect to him and his office, like the political equivalent of the Terminator. But if he is not careful, absent a treaty, which I hope that he can secure, his legacy will be public finances in such a state that an army of economists, accountants and lawyers will not be able to disentangle or remedy.

1295 But I digress, Madam Speaker; I am returning to my point. We need a Parliament that mirrors our society. If we are to have a democracy in which people feel reflected, we need more women, more working-class Gibraltarians and other minorities to be present.

1300 We need measures that support these demographics so that they feel welcome here and they can overcome the hurdles that stand in their path; because we know what will happen if we do not step up to this challenge, and it is something that we should all be very concerned about. I hope that in the context of parliamentary or other legislative reform agenda we can deal with these issues by working collectively together for the common good, which is as it should be.

1305 It is with this in mind, at the forefront of my mind, that I will aim to keep my address simple, relevant and true because this would not be a state of the nation speech until it speaks to all of our nation and not just to the elites, Madam Speaker.

1310 One of the hurdles is the intolerable deficit in Gibraltar regarding parental leave and other measures, designed to distribute the responsibilities of care more equally in our society. Women continue to provide the vast majority of care in our homes to our children, the elderly and the most vulnerable. To do so, they continue to impose limitations on their careers, social lives and personal development.

1315 While it still remains part of our culture for women to be the pillars of our families and our communities, this represents an intolerable injustice that we need to transform, because every time a woman leaves a workforce because she cannot find or afford childcare, cannot work out a flexible arrangement with her employer or lacks access to equitable parental leave allowances, her family's income suffers and she imposes limitations on her own career and development.

This is particularly problematic in the private sector, where quality provisions are close to non-existent and welfare protections generally fail to live up to the standards of European democracies. So I cannot stress enough the urgency of transitioning to more equitable parental-leave policies, which also incorporate paternity leave into our legislation.

1320 We also need improved and better resourced childcare, elderly care and care for those with supported needs and disabilities. In 2019, the then Minister responsible for this crucial area of policy claimed that the consultation on this matter was at an advanced stage. This was over four years ago.

1325 When I recently enquired about this specific issue, we were informed that a working group has now been established and that active work is ongoing. But while they talk about policies that were implemented in most of Europe decades ago, we continue to fall further behind the developed world in this area.

1330 To eliminate gender equalities and stereotypes, we must progress beyond symbolic gestures. Our counterparts in modern democratic jurisdictions have advanced in this regard, while we lag behind. We must, Madam Speaker, walk the walk as well as talking the talk.

1335 And although I understand the Hon. Minister's point about high taxation in Scandinavian countries enabling advanced parental-leave programmes, I do not accept that Gibraltar's lower taxes justify our significant lag in this area of equality. This policy contradicts our core democratic and constitutional values of equality, that all citizens deserve equal opportunities and protection from discrimination.

1340 I am far from convinced that the current tax levels stand in the way of development in such a crucial area. Such a defeatist attitude does them, a so-called socialist party, no credit at all. Working families face increasing pressures and need expanded support networks to manage. So apart from the aforementioned parental leave provisions, it is imperative for the Government to advance provisions for free childcare for children under school age, and wraparound care services for school-age children in Gibraltar.

1345 Comprehensive childcare solutions are essential to meet the needs of working families. Yet the Government, which criticised us for emphasising the need for reviews and audits, continues to beat around the bush on this issue.

1350 Yes, Madam Speaker, to beat around the bush and talking the talk without walking the walk. Conducting feasibility studies – not reviews, feasibility studies – and setting up working groups on critical matters affecting people's everyday lives. This is a Government that has had 13 years to develop and implement these changes. This is a Government that campaigned on the slogan of 'We can get the job done'.

1355 It is often said, Madam Speaker, that when you are high on inspiration, you can get two weeks' worth of work done in 24 hours. Thirteen years, Madam Speaker. They have had 13 years to be able to walk the walk.

1360 Indeed, Madam Speaker, there is a significant human element that the numbers in this Budget Book fail to capture or reflect, and these are the number of individuals finding themselves with increasingly less in their pockets as they grapple to meet growing financial demands. This number, we fear, continues to rise.

1365 However, the markers of a successful life go beyond financial prosperity. They encompass having a comfortable, pleasant, healthy and happy living environment, a true measure of quality of life.

1370 While it may be tempting to believe that our perfect Gibraltar is untouched by such social issues, the reality is that many families and children are facing significant vulnerabilities. We are fortunate to have NGOs and dedicated individuals in our community who work tirelessly to provide support and assistance. Likewise, we are grateful for the committed professionals who go above and beyond in their roles, and I take this opportunity to thank them and all of our wonderful NGOs for their efforts.

1375 However, Madam Speaker, there are people out there who desperately need our help. Mental health, poverty, people living in appalling conditions and families who cannot cope. We need to

help these families overcome the challenges that make them vulnerable, support the children affected and ensure that all related teams and professionals have all the resources that they need. Because at the heart of this issue, Madam Speaker, are the children.

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Improving the quality of their home lives and family relationships leads to positive outcomes. An early intervention in these areas helps children and young people develop the skills that they need to live happy, healthy and meaningful lives, increasing the possibility of success in education and personal attainment, and supporting good mental health. A greater emphasis on this and holistic ways to achieve this, can prevent individuals from entering downward spirals of anti-social behaviour and recurring offending, which are difficult to break.

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With a sharp increase in juvenile convictions, I echo the words of the Hon. Minister for Justice in this House not long ago. Prevention is better than cure. Our young people are the most important stakeholders when talking about our future and we owe it to them to offer them all the opportunities that they deserve. Indeed, we owe it to them to support those who may have strayed, to find their way back to the opportunities that we all deserve. I urge the Government to finally develop a proactive and comprehensive strategy in this regard.

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Madam Speaker, following on from this, it is crucial to highlight the importance of drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and to emphasise the brilliant work that this team does. We must continuously assess patterns to develop the service to meet our community's needs. In the last session of Parliament, I requested figures for those attending the community-based programme and the numbers had risen from 158 in 2021, to 185 in 2023. Indeed, the hon. Member has confirmed in his Budget address an increase of 40%.

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Madam Speaker, although this signals a positive step in individuals' uptake of these programmes and their desire for rehabilitation, it also suggests an increasing need for rehabilitation due to drug and alcohol abuse or addiction issues. When I enquired about the increase and how the Government was assessing the matter, the Minister responded with some amusement, suggesting that if this was the total number of people with drug problems in Gibraltar, we were doing quite well.

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However, Madam Speaker, I am afraid that the Minister seems to trivialise the issue. These figures only refer to those on this particular community-based programme and do not include those in other programmes, such as the Bruce's Farm residential programme. They do not account for the many individuals who, for various reasons, may not be ready to access rehabilitation services, nor do they include figures for young people or those who may have sought rehabilitation services in another jurisdiction.

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In any event, Madam Speaker, this is not a matter of amusement and I take the opportunity to recognise the struggle and hardship endured by individuals facing addiction issues and indeed their families. I congratulate each and every individual who is on their rehabilitation journey, sending a strong message of support to them and also to those who are yet to embark on this journey. This is not a matter to be trivialised.

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Prevention is always better than cure and while it is imperative that the figures should be monitored to continue to boost and expand the programmes on offer, encourage the uptake and eliminate any stigma associated with these programmes, the Government should also build on the work within the community to remind people, especially young people, of the health implications of drug, alcohol and substance abuse.

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Madam Speaker, I would like to move on to the crucial matter of mental health because there is no good health without good mental health, and I am sure that on this we can all agree. We all accept that there needs to be financial controls. That is not in doubt, but we should not ignore the recommendations of the Mental Health Board in their latest annual report 2023.

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Those who oversee this service and are most familiar with its intricacies lack the authority to effectively allocate financial and human resources, albeit within an agreed budget. No one is suggesting that those that oversee the service should be able to spend what they want, but for the service to operate efficiently and flourish those directly involved need significant input into budget utilisation.

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1420 Whilst there have been improvements in mental health services, Madam Speaker, it remains true that too many individuals continue to fall through the cracks, struggling to cope without receiving necessary support. Many rely heavily on their families, who often find themselves overwhelmed, and much more needs to be done to provide housing and care for individuals with chronic mental health issues to maintain periods of stability. Because, without adequate support
1425 during these crucial periods, individuals often find themselves in cycles of readmission or involuntary commitment.

Madam Speaker, we still hear far too many concerns about the availability of mental health nurses during critical moments, long waiting lists to see child psychologists and the need to revise crisis protocols for children, amongst a litany of other issues.

1430 I have to stress that I am deeply concerned by the findings of the Mental Health Board annual report, particularly regarding the critical need for additional resources. It is alarming that there appears to be no budget allocated for the furnishing of supported living flats, forcing the housing outreach to rely on charities and goodwill for furniture.

1435 Madam Speaker, a progressive healthcare vision emphasises treating more patients within the community, but this requires adequate Government budgeting and investment. Depending on charities and goodwill for essential furnishing introduces unnecessary unpredictability into this vital service.

1440 But what particularly alarmed me from in the report is the situation at Sandpits House, where subcontracted personnel face challenges in managing mental health situations and medication issues due to lack of training. This is unacceptable.

When the Government subcontracts Health and Care services, it has a duty to ensure that all staff are properly trained and equipped to handle such critical situations. Anything less risks preventable errors and we must learn from tragic past experiences. The question is, Madam Speaker, *when* will they learn?

1445 There is a concerning lack of clarity from the Hon. Minister for Health and Care regarding crucial issues, often leading to contradictions. While she affirms a strict level of training for all subcontracted staff, her statements reveal significant gaps. In answers to questions in this House, the Minister stated, and I quote:

The ERS contracts are already in place and, to my knowledge, they do not contain any provisions in relation to training, so there is no requirement to monitor them. Therefore, I cannot answer that question because it doesn't exist. In relation to the Care Agency sites, the contract that is out in relation to respite, no contract exists there so there is no standard as to training, so there is no requirement to monitor training at present.

1450 This current state of affairs leaves service users and their families grappling with uncertainty, as there is minimal assurance regarding the standard and oversight of training moving forward. Addressing such critical areas is of paramount significance, and I urge the Hon. Minister to establish a mechanism that not only ensures the competence of trained personnel, but also ensures continuous oversight of this training across all services provided to the Government and its agencies by subcontracted entities.

1455 Madam Speaker, the prevailing circumstances underscore the imperative for independent oversight and regulation of the services rendered. While acknowledging the logistical challenges posed by our nation's scale, there does nonetheless exist a compelling rationale and urgent necessity to institute a tailored, locally adapted equivalent of a Care Quality Commission to ensure autonomous oversight and regulation over Health and Care services.

1460 This remit should encompass all such services regardless of their provider, be it governmental or private entities.

Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the evident absence of a framework to identify and rectify inefficiencies within Health and Care services transcends mere concerns of resource quantity and service quality. It strikes at the heart of resource utilisation.

1465 Who, I ask, systematically evaluates and addresses inefficiencies? Who relocates these resources to optimise patient care and service delivery? Regrettably, the reality appears to be

devoid of an independent mechanism for such tasks, leading to the squandering of these resources.

1470 We urgently require an independent mechanism to oversee and regulate all facets of these issues. The Hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, knows that the GMRB does not equate to this.

Madam Speaker, I must emphasise that constituency work stands as one of the most significant aspects of my role consuming a substantial portion of my time. It is crucial to highlight that constituents express a profound concern over the Government's lack of clarity regarding Health and Care services.

1475 The Hon. Minister fails to provide lucid responses regarding whether the proliferation of subcontracted companies will be restrained or who will assume responsibility for regulating and monitoring crucial elements of the service. Indeed, some have raised apprehensions that this may be the beginning of privatisation by stealth. Only time will tell.

1480 Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the proposed integration of the Care Agency into the GHA has sparked widespread confusion and concern. And despite assurances of ongoing consultation from the Minister, feedback from those affected indicates that crucial information fails to reach heads of service, staff and even union representatives.

1485 Feedback that we receive, Madam Speaker, is that the integration is happening *sí o sí*, but the current decision to contemplate integrating the Care Agency into the GHA and incorporating its CEO into the board has raised concerns by those on the coalface providing services which the Government needs to take into account.

Additionally, the announcement just last week of the award of a tender for domiciliary care services and home support raise much more questions than answers, in respect of which there will need to be much more clarification in the future.

1490 Madam Speaker, when I embarked on my journey to seek election and subsequently earned the honour of serving, I pledged to champion a brand of politics deeply attuned with the everyday struggles faced by ordinary citizens and I am committed to listening to and advocating for working mothers, fathers, individuals and families grappling with the mounting pressures of life in these uncertain times.

1495 Engaging with constituents stands as a cornerstone of my responsibilities and it is disconcerting to note that even in the aftermath of an election, the volume of concerns continue to flood our offices and they escalate. One might have anticipated a sense of optimism post-election. Yet the prevailing reality reveals a populace still beset by dissatisfaction and no amount of self-congratulatory gestures or superficial spin can obscure that undeniable truth.

1500 Because, as I said at the outset of my speech, a shroud of opacity envelops some of the actions of this Administration. When we seek clarity through questioning, the responses from certain Ministers fall short of acceptability.

1505 Take, for instance, the case of an individual holding the position of Finance Director for the Care Agency and concurrently serving as Finance and Procurement Adviser to the Ministry of Health. Each role compensated separately to the tune of approximately £160,000, along with an accommodation allowance, too. When I pressed for information regarding the public advertisement of these positions, I was met with evasive responses.

1510 Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the lack of transparency extends to the cost to the taxpayer of advisory roles, such as the forthcoming role directly assigned by the Health Minister to the Chairperson of the GHA once they relinquish that position and assume this advisory role. Despite repeated inquiries, clear answers remain elusive and the burden on the taxpayer mounts further with unadvertised advisory positions exemplified by the Education and Training Policy Adviser post outlined in the Government's draft estimates for 2024-25, commanding a staggering annual rate of £139,886.

1515 There is a well-known phrase once said by the former Chief Secretary, 'Civil servants must do more for less'.

But, Madam Speaker, it seems that the interpretation of this so-called Socialist Government is that those at the lower end of the pay scales, both in the private and public sectors, will have to

1520 continue to do more for less, while the Government evidently continues to boost the pay packages of those at the very top. It is no surprise, then, Madam Speaker, that this is a Government that continues to fail to find a proper, sustainable and fair way to distribute pay increments for low-income earners. Instead, they prefer to resort to poorly distributed handouts that mean little in the face of continued utilities increases, social insurance increases and cost-of-living issues that affects those on lower and modest income the most.

1525 Madam Speaker, these instances compound concerns, particularly when juxtaposed with a Government reliant on the goodwill and contributions of charities to furnish supported living accommodations. Similarly, the utilisation of the ERS Donation Fund to procure hampers for Government officials brushed aside by the implicated Minister as *Sálvame* politics is deeply troubling. The public has a rightful expectation to be informed about the allocation of the funds they donate, especially when their intended purpose comes under scrutiny.

1530 Furthermore, when queried about whether all the hampers had been accounted for and declared in accordance with Government directives, the Minister failed to furnish a coherent response. What measures have been taken to investigate this matter fully? Has the circa £2,500 expended been reimbursed back to the fund?

1535 This persistent lack of transparency, whether in minor or more substantial concerns, remains a prevailing theme in their governance.

Madam Speaker, if the Government seeks an example of *Sálvame*-style politics, we need not look far. The Chief Minister's record-breaking U-turn on the pollution levy, just hours after the Budget announcement, driven by a *massive* public outcry, illustrates the Government's approach to policy development.

1540 This policy was not announced with exemptions for young people, those on lower incomes or the elderly in our society, as one would have expected from a true socialist party. Instead, it was hastily introduced and then embarrassingly retracted due to backlash on social media and from the press.

1545 This is emblematic of how this Administration operates. Politics driven by social media and public sentiment rather than thoughtful policymaking. Politics à la Facebook, politics à la speak freely, Madam Speaker.

I now turn to another area within my responsibility. The area of disability. The inability to establish a transparent, inclusive and equitable process regarding disability benefit applications is deeply concerning. It reflects a pressing need for procedural enhancements to ensure accountability, transparency and fairness in all our endeavours.

1550 This transcends political rhetoric. It is about safeguarding the trust and confidence of those we serve. Regrettably, the qualifying criteria for disability benefits remains undisclosed. It remains a mystery, Madam Speaker. Inaccessible to those in need prior to submitting the applications.

1555 This lack of transparency not only hinders applicants' ability to gauge their eligibility but also obscures whether the criteria is consistently applied or systematic disparities exist.

The statistics provided in response to questions paint a troubling picture. In 2019, 44.44% of disability benefit applications were disallowed. By 2022, this figure rose to 50.57%. Taking the average from 2019 to 2023, a total of 42.16% of all applications were disallowed.

1560 But, Madam Speaker, how do applicants know whether the refusal is justified or not when we do not know the criteria for granting disability benefits? You do not need to be a lawyer – and there are enough of those in this place – to conclude that this offends against principles of natural justice.

1565 Madam Speaker, the reluctance to disclose and provide public access to the criteria for disability benefits cannot be justified by the assumption that all applicants are inclined to exploit the system. Such a premise unfairly deprives genuine cases of information that they are entitled to. It is the Government's duty to prevent abuse but they must do so without resorting to withholding crucial information, especially when this information is available in other jurisdictions.

1570 Furthermore, Madam Speaker, the overwhelming volume of concerns regarding the extensive waiting times for these applications is deeply troubling. This benefit is designed to aid and support individuals genuinely in need, and the persistent delays are intolerable.

1575 Madam Speaker, none of this is helped by the failure of the Government to fulfil the commitments made years ago. It is imperative to move forward in the extension of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These legislative changes hold profound significance. Every parliamentary term the Government gives assurances and every parliamentary term ends with the Government failing to honour them.

1580 Now, Madam Speaker, I wish to address the escalating demand for services, provisions and support for individuals with supported educational needs within our community. This demand continues to surge and it is evident, Madam Speaker, that this area transcends politics, for me. It is extremely close to my heart; but I shall not delve into this for fear that if I do Hon. Ministers or party activists might indeed chastise me for it again.

Citing from the Government's commissioned review on factors contributing to the heightened prevalence of SEN in Gibraltar, it is evident, Madam Speaker, that multiple factors likely underpin the surge. The report explicitly states that no single cause can wholly explain this phenomenon.

1585 Undoubtedly, Madam Speaker, heightened awareness among both the public and professionals, particularly regarding conditions such as ASD, ADHD and developmental delays coupled with improved identification, screening and diagnostic tools, as well as reduced stigma, are critical contributors to this trend. However, Madam Speaker, it is essential to acknowledge that the same Government report underscores professionals' beliefs in a genuine increase in severe cases, especially those of ASD, that were previously unlikely to be overlooked.

1590 When we voiced the concerns of our constituents, Madam Speaker, particularly of individuals and families grappling with inadequate support, we do so not to discredit the progress that has been made but with a firm understanding that more comprehensive measures are imperative.

1595 We cannot ignore the plight of children with significant communication impediments, receiving minimal or no speech therapy due to strained services. Nor can we overlook the scarcity of available occupational therapy for those in need. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

1600 The protracted waiting list for ADHD assessments also remain a pressing concern, among a litany of other issues. Concerns have been expressed to me of parents and adults with ADHD having to go to Spain to be seen by doctors there because of waiting lists or because only the Hospital pharmacy dispenses Ritalin or other ADHD medication.

1605 Madam Speaker, we cannot ignore the fact that the Mental Health Board's annual inspection report further accentuates critical deficiencies, including the scarcity of local behavioural specialists, child psychiatrists, ambiguity in the ADHD referral process and the absence of the established ADHD pathways. Moreover, it delineates concerning waiting lists for children requiring psychological assessments and underscores the imperative of reviewing crisis protocols for children in acute situations.

1610 While debates may ensue regarding the reasons behind this surge, it is evident that the crux of the matter lies in the need to have proactive strategies to address these challenges. Despite potential attempts to deflect by arguing over the reasons, the urgency remains in addressing substantive concerns such as capacity issues at St Martin's School, the pressing need for a new St Bernadette Centre and the persistent issues stemming from fragmented care and inadequate regulation of subcontracted health and care providers.

1615 Madam Speaker, this underscores the imperative of continually bringing these pressing matters to this House, for they persistently resonate within our community and it is our duty to voice the concerns of our constituents and to hold the Government accountable.

And, if certain Hon. Ministers across the aisle prefer to engage in debates over historical actions, rather than focusing on the pressing realities faced by our community today, that is a matter for their conscience.

1620 As for myself, Madam Speaker, I shall steadfastly remain committed to addressing the present day challenges confronting our community and striving to implement solutions that serve the needs of today, tomorrow and our future generations.

I take this opportunity to thank you, Madam Speaker, the Clerk and the parliamentary team and the people of Gibraltar once again. Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

1625 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, hon. colleagues, Hon Ministers opposite and to all watching from home, it is an absolute privilege to rise and to deliver my first ever Budget address to this House. My contribution will cover each of my shadow portfolios, that is Youth, Tourism and Heritage, the Environment and Equalities. But before I turn to my contributions, I feel it is appropriate to take a moment to express my gratitude to the parliamentary team working here, for all the hard work that you do and for assisting Members of Parliament of this House. Your warm welcome and guidance has been very much appreciated and for that I thank you all.

1630 For the first part of my contribution, I wanted to talk about the youth of Gibraltar. As the youngest elected MP, and one of the youngest ever, it dawned on me how little has been done for youth to be engaged with our local politics. As such, I wanted to start my address with why it is important for youth to be politically engaged.

1640 The reason for this, critically speaking, is that it is a consensus worldwide that in order for political systems to be representative, all parts of society must be involved in the decision-making processes, and that includes our young people. Interestingly, however, according to recent data, around half of the world's population is under 30, yet statistically only 3% of elected MPs globally are under 30 and represent this age group.

1645 In respect of our own elections and statistics, it showed that the under-20s and the 20- to 30-year-olds were the lowest to turn out and vote. So what does this tell us? Well, it appears that young people are disengaged with our local politics also. That has to change for the good and benefit of their future.

1650 But is it their fault? I do not think so. Because why would they be engaged? There is evidently a loss of interest from our youth. They might be thinking, is anything really ever going to change in the way that things are done? Can we blame them?

Gibraltar has been riddled with scandals, some having made the international press, with the latest two unfolding only recently in the form of the Auditor's Report and the McGrail Inquiry.

Have young people lost trust in politicians and by default politics? Quite possibly. Do we understand the damage this is doing? So what do we do?

1655 Well, we need to inspire them. We need to give them hope. We need to earn their trust again. That is, if we wish to retain their engagement. I, for one, think it is important to do so. Not least because our youth are the heartbeat of Gibraltar. Their energy, creativity and potential are the future. It is our collective responsibility to ensure and provide the best future that we can for them.

1660 Moving now to the transition of our youth between education and employment. It must be said that whilst we have invested in education, we recognise however that there are still other challenges faced by our youth, particularly within the job market. To address this, we must expand vocational training programmes, increase partnerships with local businesses to provide more apprenticeships and more internships to young people.

1665 We should also bring back the Careers Fair, so that students at a young age can start to think about what they would like to do in the future. I understand that in his address on Tuesday, the Hon. Minister for Education confirmed that he hoped to bring this event back in the new academic year, and that is very much welcomed.

These initiatives must be designed to bridge the gap between education and employment, ensuring our young people are equipped with the skills and experience needed to thrive in our

1670 local job sectors. On this, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the fact that the Hon. Minister has, since elected, been trying his utmost best, particularly in these areas.

The PATHS programme, designed to empower and upskill individuals, aims to create a more inclusive and resilient workforce. It particularly focuses on those transitioning from supported employment, prison or undergoing rehabilitation. All that said, while the programme's intentions are commendable, the execution, however, appears to have significant shortcomings, as evidenced by recent parliamentary discussions.

The primary goal of PATHS is to provide individuals with the necessary skills to improve their employability and independence. However the low enrolment figures of only 29 individuals since its inception, evidence there is a significant gap between the programme's goals and its outreach. The Government's inability to predict the number of expected enrolees suggests a clear lack of planning and understanding of the target demographic. The low enrolment numbers may also reflect inadequate engagement strategies.

With that said, the PATHS programme does have a noble vision of integrating marginalised groups into mainstream workforce and it is very much hoped that there is indeed an uptake in those individuals who sign up to it.

The ZONE: Step Up and Thrive project, another recent Government initiative, is aimed at addressing the needs of young people who are not in education, not in employment or not in training, referred to as NEETs. The project's primary focus is to support and offer guidance to these individuals by providing a drop-in service where they can seek advice.

However, the operational hours of this service, very notably, is limited to a mere 90 minutes a week, specifically from 12.30 to two o'clock on every Thursday. This restricted availability raises critical questions about the effectiveness and sincerity of this initiative, described by the Minister as a beacon of hope for young people. However, the limited timeframe for the drop-in service starkly contrasts with this grandiose description.

The narrow window significantly undermines the project's potential impact. The effectiveness of any support service is heavily reliant on its accessibility, therefore the stringent time restriction of this drop-in service raises several issues.

Additionally, it is evident that to offer meaningful support and guidance requires time. A limited session once a week cannot possibly provide sufficient time to address the complex issues commonly faced by NEETs, such as mental health challenges, skills gap, social and economic barriers. The restricted accessibility will no doubt also have an impact on the continuity, consistency and most importantly the quality of the care, support and guidance that is provided and offered to those people who are not in education, not in employment and not in training.

So the project, Madam Speaker, while well-intentioned, currently falls short of its potential due to its inaccessibility and engagement. For it to truly serve as a beacon of hope for young people, the Government needs to demonstrate a more substantial commitment through extended hours, comprehensive services and effective outreach.

Because 90 minutes a week cannot possibly be the level of commitment issues such as these deserve. Only then can this initiative make a meaningful difference in the lives of NEETs and fulfil its promise of helping them to step up and thrive.

In terms of employment, it is only recently that efforts have been made in this respect. The youth have been massively unaware of the types of jobs available to them in the private sector or of the skillsets required for these roles.

So despite recent efforts made by Government, such as the new Connect Hub – which has yet to get traction – regrettably young people still feel that there is a lack of opportunity after leaving school at the age of 16, especially those who do not follow an academic career path. Many in fact find themselves unemployed for large periods of time while struggling to find a job and that has implications, both financially and emotionally.

And although the Government may boast about having an average of 29 individuals per quarter registered as unemployed, we ask what about those who do not have meaningful employment? What about those on zero-hour contracts? What about those who are moved from placement to

placement to placement in the Government's Future Job Strategy? What about those people who have no real prospect of a meaningful career? What is the Government going to do about them?

1725 Madam Speaker, because for those young people who spend long periods of time in unemployment or those who do not have meaningful employment, what often occurs is that they tend to resort to illicit activity. To support this, I refer to the most recent available data on youth crime taken from the RGP reports of 2021, which showed that in the last three years leading up to COVID, the RGP made 600 arrests in relation to youth crime, representing an average of 200 youths arrested each year; or one every other day.

1730 The majority of which related to thefts, burglaries, substance abuse, violence, vandalism and damage to property. Worrying still is the fact that according to the latest policing plan of 2023-24, the age group most arrested between 2022-23 were 18-year-olds; in 2023-24, the most frequently arrested age group were those within their 30s.

1735 We ask ourselves: would statistics be this concerning if young people had meaningful employment? So should these worrying statistics on youth crime come as a surprise to anyone? I would not think so. Not to me at least, because from my shadow portfolios youths are by far the area that least money is spent on.

1740 Putting to one side the costs of health care and education of course, we can see that £1.2 million was spent on equality; £1.9 million on heritage; a further £2 million spent on tourism; £6.8 million was spent on the Upper Rock, tourist sites and beaches; a massive £12 million on the collection and disposal of refuse; and a further £18.5 million on the environment.

In our youth, however, we only invested a mere £690,000.

1745 For the sake of our youth, we would like to see much more investment and expenditure in this area, particularly in education and training, should the Government be serious about wanting to provide beacons of hope and opportunity for young people. But whether we are able to provide for a better future for our youth and what such a future would look like very much depends on whether we manage to secure a safe and beneficial agreement.

1750 A treaty that we would hope will not cross any of our red lines, but yet one which is safe and beneficial for all the people of Gibraltar. To that I wish to bid you all good luck, because the people of Gibraltar have entrusted you with that responsibility for their sake and the sake of all Gibraltarians.

1755 Turning now to tourism, Madam Speaker, it must be noted that in terms of the data forming part of the tourism statistics, it has been raised before in this House, and I concur with those comments that the statistics are not as up to date as they could or should be, with some lagging behind many months. This is not particularly helpful when coming to assess whether the Budget Book of this year indeed represents good value for money to the taxpayer.

1760 With a view to being as constructive as possible, I note that having data which is more up to date would no doubt be useful. Nevertheless, we can see from the available data on tourist numbers that the total number of Upper Rock Nature Reserve visitors has experienced steady improvements. According to data provided by the Department of Environment on its website as at the end of 2023 the Upper Rock hosted a total of roughly 750,000 visitors, just 290,000 people less than our pre-COVID tourist levels.

1765 Therefore, although tourist site receipts may be on the rise when compared to last year's statistics, it is notable that we are not quite at pre-COVID levels yet. Whilst there is evidently still a lot of work to do, the latest figures for January 2024 do show a new record for the total number of visits to the nature reserve for a single January month, and we therefore hope – and I mean *hope* – that this trajectory continues and perhaps we may finally see again some normality when it comes to tourist visitor numbers in the Upper Rock.

1770 In terms of the number of cruise passengers and crew arrival by month, referring to the latest statistics as of April 2024, the total number of passengers stood at 55,380. However, in the same period the year before, the number of cruise passenger visitors on the same date stood at 63,616, reflecting a 13% drop in the number of visitors coming in.

1775 Similarly, in terms of the number of cruise liner arrivals to Gibraltar, this too has seen a drop of roughly 10% in the period between January to April of 2024 when compared to that of last year's. Because as at the first quarter of this year, we had only seen seven cruise ships arrive to Gibraltar. One in January, one in February and five in March. Whereas in the same period the previous year, we had already seen 18 cruises calling into our port.

1780 The economic impact that each cruise call has on our economy cannot be understated. Every vessel and the thousands of passengers that they bring provide a huge boost to our catering and our commercial retail sectors, and therefore we need to enhance our efforts in attracting cruisers and ultimately passengers, who will then in turn be spending money in Gibraltar.

1785 The number of coaches arriving via the land frontier appears to have improved significantly from last year's datasets, showing a total number of 3,993 coaches arriving to Gibraltar as at 31st December 2023. Whilst the improvement in this area is welcomed, it must be noted that the current levels are only 60% of what they used to be in 2019; 60% less, or almost half of the number of coaches that we used to enjoy. Evidently there is room for significant improvements in this respect.

1790 The number of tourists arriving via the land frontier stands at £8,795,000 as of December 2023, according to the data provided by the Borders and Coastguard Agency. This figure however equates to 2 million people less, or 20% less, than our pre-COVID levels. In fact, the last time we had this low level number of visitors was all the way back in 2007.

But much like the Hon. Chief Minister said in his address on Monday, we are not quite in the good times yet. And I agree; not quite.

1795 Finally, the number of flight arrivals to and from Gibraltar, together with the number of passengers it brings, has remained quite static over the last couple of years. So, whilst there have been improvements to the number of visitors arriving, compared to last year, they are not quite like what they used to be.

1800 We are therefore yet to see the results of the sports-led and the entertainment-led tourism which this Government promised to attract if re-elected. Instead, the Government lead with initiatives such as the introduction of selfie sticks in Europa Point, and in other locations of course; but specifically the one at Europa Point with a backdrop showing up untreated sewage spewing into the oceans. *(Interjections)* The Government then wonders why the millions of tourists it hoped would flock to Gibraltar have not yet arrived.

1805 Regrettably in terms of attracting new visitors and enhancing the experience on the Upper Rock, it is noted that the Cruise Terminal remains in an embarrassing state of decay. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)** And whilst it is appreciated that a new commitment to invest in the cruise port has been made, which will no doubt improve the tourist experience, more could nevertheless be done to enhance the visitor experience when disembarking off the cruises and navigating their way to town. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

1810 Simply because, Madam Speaker, what an experience it must be for those who come to visit Gibraltar, many for the first time. Arriving at our port in one of these magnificent vessels, what an experience it must be to make your journey on foot towards the Grand Casemate Square for your unforgettable Gibraltar visit, if only you manage to find your way there. *(Laughter)*

1815 Because our western arm, where these passengers disembark from, is unsightly, lacking proper signage and beautification whilst largely surrounded by piecemeal architectural designs. For instance, these tourists are treated to our wonderful multimillion pound bicycle lane which has remained unfinished for quite some time now and regrettably leads nowhere.

1820 The journey to and from the Port is quite frankly not designed to give a positive or lasting impression to these visitors. Only to arrive at Casemate Square to witness a massive centrepiece of a clock which is broken or for large parts of the year under repair. Madam Speaker, much like a broken clock this Government is only right just two times a day *(Laughter)* and predictably on this occasion they have got it wrong.

As previously said before in this House by my hon. colleague to my right, Mr Bossino, there needs to be a strategy which recognises that tourism and the money it brings is crucially important to our economy. In our view, focus should be on the product and of course the tourist experience.

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Because whilst the majority of the touristic experience is left to the private sector to provide, the Government is responsible for most of the product. That includes our heritage sites, our nature reserve, our beaches, our town, our roads and our entry and access points.

Improving and further investing in these areas will no doubt go a long way to enhancing the visitor experience in Gibraltar and in turn leave more money in our coffers.

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Madam Speaker, if I may briefly refer you to and quote from the latest Chamber of Commerce Tourism Manifesto 2024. It appears as follows:

Looking at the statistical record of the number of visitors along with the average spend per visitor we can see that Gibraltar's tourism sector is at best, static or in decline. What is more alarming is that the average spend per visitor has hardly grown in the last decade. We recognise that Gibraltar is largely a day trip destination rather than a place to come and stay. However, unless we can grow the number of day visitor markets and attract more visitors to come and stay, Gibraltar's tourism sector will see little or no growth and there will be little increase in the average spend per visitor.

It continues:

For several years, the Chamber has advocated that far greater attention and investment be given to the tourism sector in Gibraltar. [And] Despite successive Governments making some progress in different areas of the tourism product, it remains the Chamber's view that there has been no long-term strategy and an underwhelming lack of ambition to pursue an exciting and committed approach to a sector which offers considerable but yet unrealised potential.

In order to unlock that unrealised potential, improving our transport connectivity for tourism will be vital in attracting and being able to manage the increased visitor numbers. Expanding the visitor experience to include more sites across Gibraltar, the report says, rather than concentrating visitors in the Upper Rock, would go some way to help alleviate part of the congestion created by large influxes of people in the nature reserve.

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In this respect, it is pleasing to see the Minister's initiative on the alternative tour, which will no doubt put into focus some of the heritage sites which are located on the south side of Gibraltar, which if done correctly could go some way to alleviating the pressures experienced at times in the Upper Rock. And that is very much welcomed.

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That said, equally welcome would be for major improvements to those sites which a tour proposes to take the visitors to, if what we want is for them to have a worthwhile experience and to spend money in Gibraltar. Because, Madam Speaker, whilst all those changes are well and good, in light of the previous visitor statistics it must be noted that it is also equally important, if not more, to bring tourists to Gibraltar and improve on those numbers, because tourists are the ones who will then in turn spend money on our economy.

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Which brings me neatly to my next point, which are the hotels sleeping capacity. On this, it is noticeable that despite improvements with the opening of the Sunborn and the Holiday Inn, the current complement of hotels are insufficient to meet potential demands. Data has shown that as bed numbers increase so does the percentage of occupancy. So more beds equals more overnight stays.

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However, with the closure of the Queen's, Continental and Caleta hotels, the number of available beds is now the same as it was 20 years ago. This shortage of beds undoubtedly limits our ability to attract more visitors, who in turn will spend more money during their stay in Gibraltar. Therefore, as part of its tourism manifesto wish list, the Chamber of Commerce call on the Government to commit to increasing the number of beds available from the current 650 to 1,500 over the next decade.

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However, Madam Speaker, it is appreciated that hotel owners will only invest if it is evident that there will be a considerable number of flights coming into Gibraltar from a variety of different

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destinations, so that they can be confident that the demand for these additional beds exists. Attracting new airlines and new routes should therefore be co-ordinated with investments in hotel infrastructure.

1865 Moving away from beds and looking now at flights, it must be said that since the investment was made into the development of the new Kingsway Tunnel, we have yet to maximise the benefits of such a project by failing to expand Gibraltar's flight networks into other territories.

1870 It is evident from the statistics, Madam Speaker, that business has not yet picked up and reached the levels that they used to be, pre-pandemic. With 72,332 arrivals at our hotels in 2023, this represents a 22% decrease from the 92,000 people we had visit in 2019.

Part of the issue, we understand, in terms of the hotel industry, relates to the increase in the number of short lets on the market, which places unfair competition our hotels. I understand that in this respect the Government is proposing to introduce legislation to regulate short lets and we look forward to the opportunity to review and consider the draft legislation once published.

1875 The other cause for the downturn is evidently the drop in the volume of flights and the subsequent number of people arriving to Gibraltar as a result. It is hoped therefore that efforts are redoubled to attract new airlines and flight destinations to Gibraltar, which will no doubt boost our local economy.

1880 Madam Speaker, in terms of tourist mobility, it has been reported that with the current complement of our tour bus fleet available, Gibraltar has a capacity to transport around 1,300 people, with an additional 700 seats made-up from the taxi fleet, meaning that we could at best transport roughly 2,000 people around Gibraltar at any given time. With millions of people arriving via the land frontier, hundreds of thousands via plane and hundreds of thousands arriving via cruise ships each year, we say it is practically impossible to provide the transport services required to cater for these visitors without disappointing a very large number of them.

1885 The fact is that a major limitation of the existing bus network is that it is not tailored for tourists. There are no multilingual guides to explain our history and the stops are not always at the most convenient locations for tourist sites.

1890 Additionally, the current bus network does not allow visitors to access the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, a major tourist attraction. So while the existing bus network is adequate for local use, it is not user-friendly for tourist visitors. We must be doing more to provide for an unforgettable and pleasant experience for those tourists arriving to Gibraltar. That is, if we want the tourism industry to flourish and to grow as one of the strongest pillars of our economy.

1895 To summarise, Gibraltar's tourism statistics look bleak and somewhat worrying, to say the least. We would have hoped that by this stage, a few years out of the pandemic, that we would have attained normality when it comes to tourist numbers.

1900 That said, at the same time we evidently cannot manage increased visitor numbers without redesigning the transportation system. This redesign needs to address the movement of people from the border and the Cruise Terminal to the town, and from the town to the Upper Rock and to the tourist sites around Gibraltar. May we strongly suggest that a considerable amount of time, effort and resources are spent in these areas.

1905 Because whilst we may have seen an increase in tourism expenditure of 23.5% – as was noted earlier this week – when compared to the previous year, according to the latest data on the Tourist Survey Report 2023 it is noticeable that this figure is £50 million less per year than what we used to enjoy pre-COVID, which saw tourist expenditure in Gibraltar rising to a record £307 million.

1910 With that said, we must ensure that tourism growth is sustainable. Our focus should be on developing eco-tourism, cultural tourism, tourism that is sports-led, events-led. This will in turn attract visitors who respect and appreciate our natural environment and of course our heritage. By doing so we will preserve the very qualities that make Gibraltar special, whilst ensuring economic benefits for our community.

Madam Speaker, on heritage it is noted that, very helpfully, the Heritage and Antiquities Advisory Council Parliamentary Report 2023, which was laid before Parliament only last month, covered the activities and the work carried out during the period of January to December 2023.

1915 The report highlighted that four meetings were held by this Committee, in which numerous heritage products were being monitored, some assessed, others restored and a few were even enhanced.

That said, it is important to note that despite some progress made in this area, we are nevertheless still guided by a very much outdated Development Plan: a plan which was published in 2009 and probably drafted much earlier than that; a plan that provides policies and guidance for the development in Gibraltar, yet only has a single paragraph dedicated to heritage protection within its 134 pages.

1920 But much of that plan does not apply now, as the last few decades have witnessed transformational developments which have impacted our infrastructure and highlighted the need for review, for control and for holistic planning. Especially seeing that the current Development Plan of 2009 has not been fit for purpose for quite some time now. So, we eagerly await the publication of the new version, which I understand has only been recently tendered for a few short weeks ago.

1925 If I may briefly refer you to the Government's draft paper, Madam Speaker, entitled: 'Safeguarding our Past, Enriching our Future. A New Vision for Gibraltar's Heritage', which was issued in June 2023. As noted in the foreword, and I quote:

Gibraltar has a rich and unique heritage. It is of significance, as recognition by UNESCO of our World Heritage Site shows. Gibraltar's heritage is vital in defining our identity. It is a reference point in times of change; it helps us understand where we have come from, where we are going, and why we do things in the way that we do. Heritage touches all our lives.

I believe that this may have been quoting, or written by, the Hon. Minister for the Environment.

1930 Gibraltar has a rich and unique heritage, indeed, and therefore tighter controls are clearly needed to further improve heritage protection. Environmental policy and guidance would be welcomed to ensure best practice on sustainability, and it is also important to protect Gibraltar's natural beauty by preserving and integrating heritage sites in light of the historical context with any new developments.

1935 It is very much hoped, therefore, that the new proposed Development Plan caters for all of this, because it is crucial for our Government's resources to be managed effectively so that sufficient parts of our budget can be allocated to heritage, so as to make heritage a central focus of Gibraltar's tourism and not just a mere part of it.

1940 Failure to do so would mean that our heritage would be at risk, and we cannot afford for our historical sites to be left to deteriorate, scaled back, or eliminated altogether. Such a disregard for our heritage would not only erode our identity, but also diminish the cultural richness that attracts tourists from around the world to Gibraltar.

1945 The impact that our heritage has on tourism cannot be overlooked. Tourism is a vital component of Gibraltar's economy, yet the Budget provides inadequate support for this sector. Insufficient investment in our heritage, our infrastructure and marketing will make it all the more challenging to attract and retain visitors. Madam Speaker, our natural beauty and historical sites are key to driving tourist numbers, but without proper funding, guidance and strategic planning we risk losing our competitive edge.

1950 Which finally leads me to briefly comment on the recently new introduced tour guide initiative. The Government had recently introduced this initiative in which, in conjunction with the Gibraltar College, it would be offering a course for a qualification as a licensed guide. The course, we understand, will seek to include information on several of our most popular tourist sites and offerings. In this respect, I would be the first to say that having some kind of regulation and standardisation in this sector is most welcomed.

1955 With that said, our main concern relating to this new initiative stems from the potential for unfair competition coming from across the border. How will they be regulating and placing controls on that? Only last week I personally saw two large groups of tourists being guided by a

1960 Spanish tour operator walking into town whilst being spoken to about our history and our heritage – sometimes, I am told, incorrectly so – each with around 50 people per group.

1965 Will these foreign tour operators, who currently leave no money in Gibraltar, be required to obtain the Licensed Guide qualification from the Gibraltar College? And if so, how does the Government propose to regulate and enforce this requirement? I invite the Government to address this point in its reply, because it makes no sense on this side of the House to subject locals to rules and regulations, particularly requiring them to be qualified as a licensed guide, but not apply them to foreign – Spanish – competition. We hope to obtain clarity on that point so we can better understand this initiative.

1970 Madam Speaker, if I may briefly address you on the environment now. Our unique natural landscape is a gem that requires our utmost care and protection. Our green spaces are diminishing and pollution levels are rising. We are surrounded by construction sites and scaffoldings everywhere you go. Many say that Gibraltar looks unsightly. Worse still, filthy. All of this is not a good look when you want to attract tourism. It is also not good for us, who are living in these conditions.

1975 The use of cars as a preferred mode of transport remains unchanged, adding considerably to the traffic congestion and reducing the quality of the air that we breathe, both in our town and in the Upper Rock. Regrettably, Gibraltar has one of the highest levels of car *per capita* anywhere in the world, and that is something that we should not be particularly proud of. Yet nothing sensible is being done about this.

1980 Earlier this week we were treated to a new pollution levy, one which in effect would cost people £520 a year for having a car that is 10 or more than 10-years-old. A policy which did not do much to protect the environment as long as you could afford to pay to pollute it. A policy which most likely would have hit hardest the poorest in our community: those who own old cars as they cannot afford to buy a new one. And a policy which was not based on the emissions of what your car is producing.

1985 So, regardless of whether you had a 10-year-old hybrid or a 10-year-old diesel, you would essentially both be paying the same. A nonsensical policy that was later qualified on interview on the GBC by the fact that, having himself bought a Porsche to cheer himself up, that happens to be over 10 years old, that he too would be liable to pay this levy.

1990 Well, I am sorry to say, but for most people – most working-class people – they could not buy a Porsche even if they saved up for it, Madam Speaker, let alone buy one because they wanted to cheer themselves up. (*Interjection*) I can totally understand, therefore, why this has been perceived as insulting and degrading by the people of Gibraltar. Nevertheless, I am glad that the Hon. Chief Minister very quickly came to his senses and backtracked on this new budgetary measure in record time.

1995 When analysing some of the data, we can see that according to this year's estimates of expenditure, the departmental budget for the environment was 20% over budget by a total of £1.9 million. From the overspend, a total of £1.5 million was incurred in relation to charges for cleaning streets and public places. The collection and disposal of refuse was also 35% over budget.

2000 It would come as no surprise to anyone that on election year a considerable amount of taxpayers' money was spent towards collection and disposal of refuse and the cleaning of our streets. Whilst these efforts are welcomed, because it is high time that our streets and our air quality are kept clean, it is hoped therefore that such efforts are made on a more regular basis, not least because despite the increases of expenditure in this area, many feel that Gibraltar does not appear to be any cleaner. So, I dare ask: are we really getting value for money here?

2005 Madam Speaker, in terms of the Upper Rock tourist sites and beaches, it is highlighted that these too were slightly over budget by £1 million. Which brings me to my next observation, that is: what exactly was £6.8 million spent on?

2010 Our beaches remain dirty and covered in dust from nearby construction sites and have been for the better part of the last decade now, many of which should have finished some years ago.

We sincerely hope that for the sake of our waters, the beaches and the people who use them that the newly announced Eastside project does not take as much time to complete.

2015 Speaking of our waters, I cannot not highlight the fact that a few weeks ago I had the pleasure of being invited to see a screening of the latest Orca documentary, produced by an award-winning filmmaker who is now based here in Gibraltar. We were also fortunate enough to be treated to some local footage of fin whales and dolphins, and I must say it was absolutely amazing to watch.

2020 I mention this story as it was remarkable to see the incredible marine life surrounding our waters, the incredible biodiversity that we have, to think that an award-winning short-film maker, who had by then travelled around the whole world, came to Gibraltar to record and finalise his video content. Because very quickly it became apparent what a splendid marine habitat we have, and how lucky we are to have it.

Remarkable indeed. But more remarkable still is the fact that we continue to pump raw, untreated sewage into our oceans despite the splendour of marine life surrounding us. Gibraltar is greener than ever, or so they say.

2025 The Straits of Gibraltar, Madam Speaker, are a migratory corridor for whales and dolphins who are both protected species under the Nature Protection Act. In fact, the law says that these animals must not be intercepted or interfered with, and that navigating close to them is not allowed. Yet, reports have been made of people chasing fin whales on their jet skis or chasing dolphins and throwing fishing lines into pods in the hope of catching an under-passing tuna. 2030 Where is the environmental enforcement and protection of the wonderful marine biodiversity that we have?

It appears that the Government has fallen out of touch with the environment. It is doing very little to carry out enforcement within our waters. It is doing even less to mitigate against the negative effects of climate change. So, are we really doing enough? Not in our view.

2035 We believe that is because it is not popular to do so. Because when you are on a desperate mission of vote hunting for your own survival, instead of projecting ourselves on the international stage by perhaps leading in marine life migration and research, we instead make an economy out of environmentally harmful business practices such as bunkering, which often takes place too close to our shores, and whilst we continue to pump raw untreated sewage in our oceans.

2040 Whilst the Government may wish to pretend that we are greener than ever, to that I say there is clearly a lot left more for wanting. This Government needs to do better for each of us, our children and our children's children.

Looking now at renewable energy, I highlight the fact that in 2019 electricity consumption for Gibraltar was around 176 GW. In 2045, electricity use is projected to reach 199 GW. For context, 2045 if we were to go fully renewable, and if we were to use 100% of our available roof space to use solar-mounted PVs, this would only be able to produce approximately 20% of the energy which we will require. The remaining energy would need to be met with additional renewable sources such as mini-farms or even wind supply.

2050 So, I dare ask: is this even attainable? Because the last time questions were asked in this House on renewables, Madam Speaker, we were shocked to hear that despite the hundreds of thousands, if not millions of pounds spent in investment, that Gibraltar's renewable energy production only amounted to a minute 1.4% of our total energy consumption.

Just 1.4% after having spent millions of pounds in this area. Can we do better? Quite frankly, we think so.

2055 But why does all this matter, you might ask yourself? Well, because climate change is increasingly recognised as a threat to the security and stability of every country in the world and that includes Gibraltar. An increase in global temperatures would mean a rise in extremely hot days all year round, a reduction in annual rainfall and a rise in sea temperatures and levels. It will also increase the energy demand for things like air-conditioning, which would undoubtedly put 2060 increasing pressure on our energy grid, and not least our emission targets.

Our surrounding natural environment will be unrecognisable. Natural habitats and biodiversity will regrettably be lost. The loss of our beaches due to coastal erosion or sea level rises will

undoubtedly have an impact on tourist numbers arriving in Gibraltar. This will hurt our economy and more importantly have an impact on the way we live our lives.

2065 Because, Madam Speaker, when I speak with young people, one of their main concerns is the environment and that Government simply pays lip service to the global move to changing the way that we live our lives. So, it is evident that, despite our efforts, there is room for significant improvement if we really are to put our money where our heart is.

2070 Work is needed to get Gibraltar back on track to meet its first carbon budget and also the 2030 interim environmental targets. To do so will require a lot of investment from the Government. Investment with money that we just do not seem to have, or at least budget for.

2075 Nevertheless, going forwards, it is positive to note the recent measures announced by the Hon. Chief Minister on Monday confirming that we will adopt green procurement policies as a requirement to supplying the Government. Policies such as these will no doubt put the onus on the successful tenderer and help in achieving and complying with our environmental targets. A measure that was discussed only recently at one of our environmental committees, which only serves to show the importance of these committees and the value in collaboration in areas where the parties across this House can present a united front, like the environment.

2080 I mean it, when I say that, because I think it is important to do so, to be united in certain policy areas where possible.

When it comes to equalities, I must highlight the excellent progress made in this area, particularly since the inception of the ministry itself, which has no doubt been instrumental in co-ordinating and facilitating the raising of awareness of inequalities wherever they may arise.

2085 In terms of gender equality, women, for instance, are frequently playing key roles within our Government, our businesses, our local community, and that should only be celebrated. With that said, we acknowledge that efforts could be improved to break down the barriers of gender inequality, so that they too are better represented within the senior decision-making positions of our society.

2090 In respect of the LGBTQ+ community, it is commendable that a legal framework was put in place to protect and enshrine the rights of this community. Initiatives like these, which are designed to combat discrimination and provoke diversity, are finally bearing fruit. But there remains much more to do. Pride Month, which has recently concluded, served as an important reminder that we must continue to support our LGBTQ+ community and not rest until every Gibraltarian enjoys the same rights, the same opportunities and the same protections.

2095 In terms of protections, what support groups are being offered to this community? Have we bothered to find out whether higher rates of depression are experienced by those in this community? Gibraltar is small, so it would be relatively easy to gather this data. Data which is of importance so that we can provide the right level of care and support for those who need it the most.

2100 Because, Madam Speaker, the most recent study led by Stonewall in 2018 found that half of the LGBTQ+ community had experienced depression; three in five had experienced anxiety; one in eight people in the LGBTQ+ community aged 18 to 24 have attempted to end their lives. The study also showed that almost half of trans people had thought about taking their own life.

2105 What about hate crime statistics? Do we have any in this area? Is there not an appetite to dig deeper and to understand the root causes of the issues and the problems faced so that we can better protect and support the people of this community? Because whilst Pride celebrations are excellent, we need to do more than just having a commercial yearly event if we are to bring meaningful change to this community.

2110 Madam Speaker, with regard to social equality, having analysed the statistics, I cannot but not highlight the fact that in 2023, the Government received a total of 206 applications for Social Security benefits. From the latest data available on the Department of Social Security website, we can see that, in January alone, there was more than a 100% increase in applications received in comparison to last year. 23 applications had been received for that single month. A worrying trend if this were to continue to rise.

2115 In addition, the number of individuals receiving disability benefit arrangements, according to the latest data, is notable. Of concern is a rising number of children aged 0 to 10 who are receiving disability benefits, which has risen from 63 individuals in January 2023 to 88 individuals in January 2024, representing a 40% increase in just a short 12-month period.

2120 Perhaps something to look into and certainly to keep an eye on, so that we can better assess whether we have the facilities and infrastructure in place to be able to cater for the rising numbers of persons living with disabilities. It is paramount that we are proactive and not reactive in this area, as has been the practice in the past.

2125 Touching again on gender equality, it is notable that we have yet to see the equalisation of pensions between men and women, despite this Government promising to do so. A policy which would have ended the current discrimination between women, who can receive state pensions at 60, and men who currently have to wait until they are 65 to receive it. A promise which has been successively broken since the so-called 'New Dawn' of 2011.

2130 We have yet to see the replacement of maternity leave with parental leave within our legislation, which would otherwise allow parents of newborns to share the paid leave between them. There have been many Bills which have been passed before this House since the start of the new parliamentary term and one wonders why such a simple legislative amendment has not been brought to the floor. If this Government truly stands by its desire to empower women and to remove barriers to equality, then more must be done, and quickly, to provide them with the necessary tools to succeed in their careers or indeed in politics or elsewhere.

2135 On this point, however, I must highlight that a few weeks ago the Hon. Minister for Equality confirmed to this House that a consultation was taking place with members of the private sector on the impact of this legislation and how that would affect their business. We look forward to reviewing the draft Bill and are hopeful that the legislative change will be quickly resolved following such a consultation.

2140 Additionally, whilst we have a halfway house for women, we have yet to see a halfway house for men, despite repeated calls from Action for Housing to do so. I refer to a letter dated 20th May 2024 and addressed to the Hon. Minister for Housing and written on behalf of Action for Housing, where it is noted the following, and I quote:

Dear Minister,

In August 2023 the Government filed plans for an accommodation block at Europa Point, which would provide 256 beds in over 110 rooms for key workers and for homeless men. Prior to this announcement, which we welcomed, the Government had announced a similar facility in October 2020. At this time, the Government said it would construct a hostel comprising 665 beds at the MOT Centre site. This project never went ahead, and instead the Europa Point one was announced, which regrettably has also been shelved.

As we have said on numerous occasions over the years, there is a need to provide a halfway house for men. It is a well-known fact that after separations, it is the mothers with their children who keep the matrimonial home and the fathers leave, some of which are made homeless.

Currently, there is a halfway house for women, but no such facility for men. A similar facility for men, which would give them a temporary roof over their heads once they rebuild their lives and manage to secure more permanent accommodation.

We wish to know whether you have any plans to provide a facility for homeless men, who at the moment have to rely on family members or friends to give them shelter and whose plight is very seldom acknowledged.

2145 A powerful statement indeed. So why is it, I ask, if statistically men are the ones who leave the family home, that we have not set a halfway house up for them? Because, Madam Speaker, when it comes to equalities, the Budget regrettably falls short in addressing the disparities that persist in our society.

2150 Funding cuts to social services, allowances, community programmes all disproportionately affect marginalised groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities, low-income families and our youths. By failing to support these people, we are perpetuating inequality and social injustice for many more years to come.

It is clear, therefore, that whilst this Government attempts to portray itself as a party that champions equality, it is regrettably noted that they have fallen significantly short in attaining that

2155 honour. Whilst things have evidently got better in some areas, there remains desirable improvement in others.

Madam Speaker, I would like to end my address by noting that it is all our collective responsibilities to advocate for a Budget that reflects our values and our priorities.

2160 For my part, we must demand greater investment in environmental sustainability, in youth development, in heritage preservation, social equality and tourism promotion. Only by addressing these issues can we ensure a prosperous and beneficial future for all the people of Gibraltar, and more particularly our young people.

2165 Drawing now to a close, I ask that my contribution and more specifically my criticisms are taken constructively and not destructively. It is important to understand that it is our role as Opposition to ask questions, to demand answers and to hold this Government to account. Therefore, for all the reasons previously expressed, and for all those reasons provided by my hon. colleagues, and for those reasons that are still yet to come, I will not be voting in favour of this Appropriation Bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

(Banging on desks)

Adjournment

2170 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, if I can thank the hon. Gentleman for that elegant address, despite the conclusion that it reached, which as he knows I will explain later in the week why I think is, frankly, the wrong conclusion. But it was nonetheless a very elegantly and eloquently presented reason for his decision.

I move that the House should now adjourn until tomorrow at 3 p.m.

2175 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m. I now put the question which is that this House do now adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed. This House will now adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m.

The House adjourned at 4.46 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 7.30 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 4th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with laying of document

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 4th July 2024.
Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

5

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I beg to move under Standing Order 7(3) to suspend Standing Order 7(1) to proceed with the laying of documents on the table.

Madam Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

PAPERS TO BE LAID

10

Clerk: Papers to be laid. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Annual Report for the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2024 and the audited accounts of the Gibraltar Regulatory Authority for the year ended 31st March 2024.

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Madam Speaker: Ordered to lie.

The Appropriation Act 2024 — Second Reading — Debate concluded

Clerk: Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024. Continued.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. L M Bruzon.

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Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, as I rise today to give my first Budget speech, I am reminded of the Chief Minister's words last year when he reminded Members of Parliament that our time here is a privilege and ought not to be taken for granted.

25

Madam Speaker, October 2023 was a turning point in the lives of many of us, not only on this side of the House but also for the Opposition benches. Elections can be ruthless, Madam Speaker, especially in such a small community. They can be merciless not only in those standing for election,

but worse still on families and loved ones. A very special mention goes to loved ones, partners and our respective children, who often have to bear the sharp end of our choices to join public life. But join public life we did, despite knowing of the inevitable consequences, because we all
30 felt that we could make a difference to our community.

Madam Speaker, during the 2023 election month, we reminded our tiny but beautiful nation of our accomplishments over the last 12 years: new school, boats marina, a new primary care centre, national bank, university and so on. But I will not pretend to take credit for any of those
35 incredible achievements, as I have spent the last 20 years in the background as an executive member of the Liberal Party.

Today, Madam Speaker, it is with enormous pride that I present this snapshot of my ministerial portfolio, what has happened and what we aim to achieve over the next financial year.

I would like to commence with the AFRS. The Airport Fire and Rescue Service has, during the
40 past financial year, gone through a period of significant staff renewal, which arose from several retirements which necessitated new entrants to be engaged and trained to ensure business continuity. Over the past four months, a total of five new firefighters have been accepted into the AFRS.

Also linked to the retirements and following rigorous selection board processes, a number of
45 promotions took place across all operational ranks. Enhancing the staffs' skills and knowledge to develop its operational output is at the ethos of the AFRS, and in this respect a considerable number of training courses were attended across all levels during this period.

Numerous firefighters and officers undertook courses to either qualify, rectify or gain an
50 instructor qualification in disciplines such as chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear responses, incident command, aviation firefighting, breathing apparatus instructors and joint service programme instructors. All of these resulting in accredited qualifications.

Officers also attended various aviation fire and rescue industry-specific events abroad, which provide excellent opportunities to network with industry professionals from across UK airports and beyond.

Additionally, beyond the confines of the airfield, the AFRS supported several multi-agency
55 exercises throughout Gibraltar, participating collaboratively with partner agencies. Working closely with the Office of Civil Contingencies, it actively participates in emergency planning forums, dynamically contributing to develop and test Gibraltar's resilience to face any eventuality.

The AFRS also continues to work very closely with the GFRS, Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service,
60 collaborating on training and other projects of mutual benefit, all of which contribute positively to the safety of our community.

During this financial year, the AFRS was scrutinised by inspectors from both the Defence Fire Service and the Civil Aviation Authority. These audits provided further assurance that the AFRS is performing and delivering a service in compliance with UK and international mandated aviation
65 regulations, and standards confirming that its personnel manning and resources are sufficient to safely fulfil its expected operational response.

Ensuring the welfare of its staff is a fundamental duty of care for the AFRS. In this respect, a number of infrastructural improvements have been undertaken within the fire station to ensure its facilities meet the current operational and welfare risks required. These will continue to be
70 phased in during the next few years.

As a lean and multifaceted unit, the small but dynamic AFRS team strives for organisational and individual self-improvement, ensuring its firefighters are equipped with the tools and resources to safely and effectively perform the critical and ever-evolving challenges expected of them.

Madam Speaker, moving on to the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service. The GFRS is an
75 organisation that prides itself on setting high standards of performance in the service provided to our community. With the development and review of fire safety standards across the globe, particularly in the UK, and continued innovative fire solutions, the GFRS fire safety team is

constantly challenged and does a magnificent job in anticipation of risks subsequently contributing to front-line operational preparedness.

80

The GFRS continues with attempts to develop and achieve short- and long-term goals.

A number of ongoing matters include an overhaul and modernisation of breathing apparatus, which will be carried out in the next financial year. Senior management is currently reviewing GFRS resources aligned to UK National Operation Guidelines and Gibraltar's risk elements. Once adequate numbers have been determined, HMGoG will work with the GFRS accordingly.

85

With regard to software, Madam Speaker, significant progress has been made with the local service provider to develop and modernise internal systems. The main objective is to improve efficiency in emergency response and day-to-day working practices.

The restructure of the GFRS was recently approved by my office, and senior management are now in the process of implementing the various phases. This will include the introduction of a dedicated training department.

90

Temporary promotions have taken place on a rotational basis, with a view to provide all potential candidates with an equal opportunity to progress through the ranks. With the recent transfer of the Ambulance Service to the GHA have come several changes in protocols, training content and responsibilities. That said, the fire control operators will maintain a level of emergency response training to provide resiliency, if required.

95

Madam Speaker, with a year average of over 500 building applications, the GFRS continues to liaise with Building Control to ensure that new builds comply with standards of fire safety. Now more than ever, we must ensure that buildings provide assistance to our front-line responders to safeguard fire crews and residents. The GFRS are in the process of consulting with Building Control to manage fees for fire safety consultations as part of the Building Control process. Also under review, Madam Speaker, with the Government law officers, are the petroleum licence fees, with a likely change during the course of this financial year following consultation with myself and my colleague, Minister Cortes. This will most likely move to a system of fees based on quantities and risks.

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Madam Speaker, the recently appointed firefighter, Mr Neil Wink, has completed his 15-week firefighter development course in the UK. This will be followed by another eight weeks of intense and locally-conducted training in rope rescue, diver search and rescue, emergency response driving, emergency medical response and other aspects of GFRS responsibilities.

110

The GFRS senior management continue to review its current legal framework to align it with the roles and responsibilities of a modern-day fire and rescue service.

Madam Speaker, with relation to mental health, the new Head of Welfare, Divisional Officer, Mr Adrian McComb, continues to work hard with the GFRS counsellor and well-being champions to ensure support mechanisms with clear policies and guidance.

115

The Chief Fire Officer recently carried out a review of the GFRS through an independent inspector, Mr Phil Cox. This has highlighted a number of issues that senior management are already working on, mainly to do with data capturing through the development of technology.

Two 17-year-old support vehicles are being replaced with electric vehicles. The main function of these vehicles is to serve duty officer deployment to the fireground as well as to aid the fire safety team to perform their daily responsibilities.

120

Madam Speaker, with relation to the new fire station, we are working on an exciting project for a new home for the GFRS. A presentation of the concept design has been made to the GFRS staff and this has been well received by all.

With regard to facilities training, we are working on the enhancement of the existing training facilities. The new facility will provide our firefighters with the minimum expected training of breathing apparatus, heat exposure, compartment fire behaviour and ship firefighting, among other elements of specialist responsibilities. We are working with Gibdock for a potential bespoke facility built locally. Furthermore, a purposely built facility will help enhance the ability to respond to MoD assets, primarily the Royal Navy.

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130 Ship firefighting, high-rise firefighting, compartment firefighting behaviour and search and rescue in heat and humidity are elements of GFRS responsibilities where training is currently undertaken in the UK at a cost.

Madam Speaker, with regard to an aerial ladder, research has been undertaken and practical tests have been carried out locally with the two main suppliers. HMGoG has committed to the purchase of an aerial ladder platform for the GFRS. The GFRS continue to liaise with members of the UK Resilience Framework with a view to have added support as part of the response to incidents involving collapsed structures, rockfall and earthquakes.

Madam Speaker, the GFRS continue to form a vital part of Gibraltar's ongoing development as a modern and safe community, with significant involvement in major projects, public events and residential developments. The aim of their involvement in these projects is not only to familiarise themselves with potential risks, but also to ensure their new builds comply with fire protection and safety standards, aimed at saving lives and assisting fire service operations.

Finally, Madam Speaker, the GFRS, in partnership with HMGoG, will continue to be fully committed to working effortlessly in fire prevention and protection, and the maintenance of an effective response to a wide range of potential incidents, with one overarching aim: to safeguard our community.

It is nevertheless vital that we continue to support our front-line firefighters, who are the most exposed to risk, by ensuring that we provide them with the tools necessary to perform effectively on the fireground and maintain their skills at the highest possible level.

150 Madam Speaker, I will now cover my responsibilities under industrial relations, a matter for which, for obvious reasons, has always been close to my heart. My background as a trade unionist previously discharging convener duty roles gives me the necessary insight to understand the interplay between unions and the public sector, and the unions and the community as a whole.

Unions play an important role in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes this is evident as disputes arise and play out in public, whereas other times their influence is more indirect, such as their impact on policy-making behind the scenes as a pre-eminent stakeholder. This Administration places the Government-union relationship at the heart of its business and will continue to do so, despite any disagreements that we may have from time to time.

160 Whilst it is true that the current financial climate still requires a degree of financial prudence and responsibility, there are matters that the Government has been able to square, such as those related to Gibraltar Bus Company, HM Prison and others. There are other areas to which Government hopes to bring a resolution in due course.

The ministry that I lead will be sensitive to the views and needs of the unions in Gibraltar and will continue to work hand-in-hand with them to address issues they raise whenever these are justified.

Madam Speaker, the Minister with overall responsibility for the public service is the Chief Minister. I have nonetheless inherited from my predecessor matters concerning the revision and modernisation of the Public Sector Code, commonly known as General Orders.

170 This is the manifesto commitment which I am keen to fulfil. The incumbent Director of Personnel and Development, together with his staff, are building on the blocks which were established during Stephen Linares' stewardship of industrial relations.

The current document is obsolete in many respects. It currently underpins the Civil Service, the Gibraltar Development Corporation, as well as many other agencies, Government-owned companies and authorities in one form or another. The objective is for the rebranded and reinvigorated Public Sector Code to meet the needs of the 21st century public sector; the springboard for its future success. I am keen to resolve this where the urgency requires.

180 Madam Speaker, I move on to my responsibility for the King's Bastion Leisure Centre. I am delighted to share the remarkable progress and success that the King's Bastion Leisure Centre – KBLC – has achieved over the past year. In 2023, the Centre continued to operate effectively, with an impressive increase in revenue of 7% over the previous year. This marks the most profitable year to date for KBLC, a testament to the hard work and dedication of the staff and management.

A significant portion of this revenue – about one-third – was generated from the most popular attraction, which are the bowling lanes.

185 Alongside the bowling lanes, the fitness gym and the amusement arcade remained top attractions, drawing in many visitors and adding to the revenue streams. The amusement arcade in particular saw exciting developments in 2023, with the addition of five new arcade games. It now boasts a total of 63 machines offering a wide variety of entertainment options for our young visitors.

190 Other streams such as the Boulder Park, the popular Cannonball store and the room rentals also performed well throughout the year. The Boulder Park in particular saw climbing routes changed twice in the year, utilising a professional route-setting team from the UK. This ensures that our climbing routes remain challenging and varied, keeping our users engaged and excited to return.

195 The Cannonball Store introduced the sale of comics and collector editions, a category that had been long absent from our Gibraltar newsagents.

Among the many events hosted, the 15th anniversary celebration of the Centre’s inauguration stood out as a highlight. This event attracted a record number of visitors and showcased the community’s continued support and enthusiasm for the Centre. The management team at KBLC set ambitious targets for increasing revenue and reduced the overrunning costs of the Centre.

200 I am proud to report that these targets have once again been successfully achieved. This accomplishment not only underscores the commitment to operational efficiency but also ensures that the Centre remains a vibrant community hub.

As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to further enhancing the offerings and experiences of the King’s Bastion Leisure Centre.

205 In conclusion, I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff and management team and the community for their unwavering support. The success of the KBLC is a collective achievement and it is the community’s enthusiasm and participation that drives us to keep improving and innovating. I look forward to another successful and exciting year in the King’s Bastion Leisure Centre.

210 Madam Speaker, I now move on to civil contingencies. Recent global events underscore the critical importance of security and resilience. From the war in Ukraine, conflicts in Israel and Palestine, and attacks on vessels in the Red Sea, to international terrorism, state-sponsored cyberattacks and climate change, our world is increasingly volatile. These challenges remind us of our collective responsibility to prepare for every eventuality.

215 In Gibraltar, the last few years have highlighted our own vulnerabilities. We have faced COVID-19, the OS 35 collision, the Gas Venus oil spill, and a fire at Power’s Drive Tunnel that disrupted our water supply. These incidents are stark reminders that disasters can and do happen close to home. The Office of Civil Contingencies plays a pivotal role in enhancing Gibraltar’s resilience by collaborating with emergency services, Government Departments, agencies, the military and other key partners, who ensure that our preparedness and ability to effectively respond to and recover from emergencies.

220 As a cornerstone of the Gibraltar Contingency Council and its Executive Committee, the Office of Civil Contingencies co-ordinates much of the emergency planning work through six joint tactical groups. These groups focus on air, land, maritime, cyber, health and social care, and critical national infrastructure. Over the past 12 months, significant progress has been made in these areas. The Gibraltar National Security Risk Assessment has been updated, providing a comprehensive understanding of the risks of the landscape. This crucial document informs our risk management decisions, identifies vulnerabilities, and drives the development of multi-agency emergency response plans.

230 We have developed and maintained risk-based multi-agency response plans, including Major Incident Response Plan, Marauding Terrorist Attack Plan, CBRN Response Plan, Upper Rock Nature Reserve Fire Plan, Cybersecurity Plan and Mass Casualty Plan. Site-specific plans have also been created for various critical locations, ensuring preparedness across the board.

235 The ongoing EU Treaty negotiations and associated non-negotiated outcome planning work is a priority. The Office of Civil Contingency supports the Deputy Chief Minister in mitigating potential impacts and has conducted numerous tabletop exercises for Government Departments, agencies and business organisations. The Trauma Risk Management Policy, launched in September 2023, is another key achievement and is now an established pan-Government policy, sitting under the Department of Personnel and Development.

240 TRiM managers and practitioners were qualified throughout 2023, and further training is planned to ensure that appropriate levels are maintained in the first responding organisations. This policy ensures that our first responders receive the necessary support with ongoing training to maintain appropriate levels. Training and exercising remains paramount.

245 The Office of Civil Contingencies has led numerous multi-agency training events and exercises, ensuring that our responders are well-prepared for any major incident. These efforts include testing response for a marauding terrorist attack, LNG emergency, and air emergency. Event Safety Advisory Group, led by the Office of Civil Contingencies, play a crucial role in ensuring public safety during events.

250 The significant investment in Gibraltar's Geographical Information System – GIS – continues to be made. A bespoke incident management platform improves situational awareness across all agencies and at every level of command.

Civil Contingencies facilitates the training for GIS operators and the system assists commanders in gaining a better understanding of the incident they are faced with.

255 The Government owns an integrated, automated and centralised IT system to collect, store and process data regarding people, vehicle, vessel, and aircraft movements in and out of Gibraltar via land, sea and air for the purposes of law enforcement, known as the National Security Centralised Intelligence System.

260 The Office of Civil Contingencies acts as co-ordinator for the Government's law enforcement agencies and chairs the NSCIS Working Group. The system is a key component to our security infrastructure.

In conclusion, our commitment to resilience and preparedness is unwavering. Through the dedicated efforts of the Office of Civil Contingencies and its partners, we continue to enhance Gibraltar's security, ensuring that we are ready to face any challenges that may come our way.

265 Madam Speaker, I will now continue with my aerial responsibility as Minister for Sports and Leisure. Locally, and as per usual, league programmes and development initiatives were completed as brilliantly as always by the army of volunteers who organise and run them. Participation levels are once again up and both the Bayside and sports complexes have been extremely busy and are a sight to behold when at full capacity.

270 In its second operational year, or sporting season should I say, Lathbury has become the main facility for both the athletics and swimming associations. In addition, the Gibraltar Triathlon Association and the Gibraltar Football Association, among others, are also regular users of the facility, with the schools and Special Olympics holding their sports days and national games at the complex. In relation to GASA and the GAAAs specifically, both sporting bodies have now established their training and competitive programmes. They can now plan and welcome visitors, with GASA having hosted visitors for the first time in several years.

275 Additionally, the Gibraltar Amateur Athletics Association has recently hosted the Athletics Championships of the Small States of Europe. The capability of the facility, which amongst other things includes fixed installations for electronic timing, have made this a reality.

280 Other than the recent Island Games, one recently has to cast the mind back to the last time an athletics event of this standard was held locally. This has been made possible by not only the hard work of the athletics fraternity, but also because of the unprecedented investment in sporting infrastructure undertaken by the GSLP Liberal Government.

285 The Lathbury swimming pool, which for a short period of time was only accessible to members of GASA and the Gibraltar Triathlon Association, is now accessible to the general public and has been for a number of months.

The recruitment of six extra pool operatives at the turn of the year has allowed manning levels to be met, thus offering public swim time in a similar safe environment to that enjoyed at the GASA Swimming Pool Complex on Europort Avenue.

Bookings have become very popular and have been easier to obtain than ever before. Implementation of online booking systems at all GSLA facilities now means that swimmers or those, for example, wanting to enjoy a game of padel tennis can book from the smartphone, tablet or other electronic devices. It is important to note that bookings can still be done through the GSLA's counters or over the phone.

Madam Speaker, we cannot only concentrate on the new venues. I believe it is safe to say that, apart from schools, sporting facilities are those most utilised by our children and young adults. Given the positive health effects of exercise on many fronts, it is important to continue to maintain high standards so that those wishing to avail themselves of this service can do so in the knowledge that they have safe and adequate facilities.

Rolling maintenance was an area that needed reviewing, and I am glad to report that this is being addressed effectively and quickly. Unfortunately, facilities do have a shelf life, and we need to address this also. As an example, pitches three and four at the Bayside Sports Complex were both resurfaced during the last financial year, at a cost of £68,153.35.

Next in line are the hockey pitches, with a tender for the resurfacing recently being issued. Their longevity is a testament to the hard-working team at the GSLA, who have kept this facility to international standards for at least a decade longer than any similar facility anywhere else in Europe. Just as with the football pitches, however, they have stretched the limit. This facility has only recently hosted another Euro hockey tournament, and by design the new surface with periphery works will continue to be considered as a host venue for similar events in future.

This commitment shows how crucial participation in international events is both home and abroad. We continue to advocate that all those who are full or affiliate members of their international governing bodies, need to be active within their international frameworks. Given this, the GSLA continues to support associations on many levels, not least financially.

To this end, the financial support received in the last financial year by sports associations was £346,533.97. This figure represents support offered to registered associations for participation at international events, sports development initiatives and minor improvements to facilities. Applications were received and painstakingly scrutinised by the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those voluntary members of GSAC who work very hard for very little recognition, if any.

It has been my first year as Chair of GSAC, and I must be honest and admit that I was unaware of the magnitude of what happens behind the scenes. The process ensures that associations themselves vote for experienced and knowledgeable members of our community to safeguard their interests.

Given the dynamic nature of sport, the criteria and policies are constantly under review. Many thanks to them, in particular, Madam Speaker, to Mr John Gonçalves, who has been a continuous member of GSAC since its inception in 1974.

Madam Speaker, event-led tourism continues to be an area where we, as a Government, continue to promote on many levels, not least in the sports and leisure sector. As a result, we have repeat customers and Gibraltar continues to be considered an excellent host, resulting in many events of an international standard being held locally.

European and world-governing bodies continue to entrust Gibraltar with the staging of events that are on their international calendars.

Aside from the obvious benefits to our local sports people, this policy also puts visitors in local hotels, promotes visitors eating and drinking in local bars and restaurants, and shopping in local establishments, as well as visiting tourist sites. We continue to be the standard-bearer for such initiatives, and the hard work of our volunteers in this regard cannot be underestimated.

The following list is not exhaustive, but shows some of the main events held locally during 2023-24 financial year. Madam Speaker, we had the Gibraltar International Backgammon

Tournament, Classic Car Rally, Euro Hockey Club Challenge II, Harley-Davidson Rally, the Junior Darts Corporation World Championships, Squash International Open, European Cricket Network
340 T10 Tournament, Europe Under-17 Open Challenge, Eurafrica Trail, and International Rugby 7s. These and other events are supported logistically and financially in different levels. From a financial standpoint, the support offered to these events to cover contractual obligations, set up and logistics totalled £168,881.34.

We have become more selective in the events that we choose. By doing so, we are providing a
345 better and more efficient return for the taxpayers. Many of these events will take place again during the current financial year. As previously stated, we have already hosted the Athletics Championships of the Small States of Europe, but to this we need to add the FIBA Europe Under-16 Women's Euro Basket Division C, which will be happening now in July, and the UCI Mountain Bike event which will be happening in October this year.

350 Madam Speaker, it would be a disservice to speak about the hosting of international events without mentioning the Netball Youth World Cup that will be hosted in Gibraltar in September 2025. Gibraltar will host between 450 to 600 players from all corners of the Commonwealth, with fans, media and dignitaries also expected to attend.

The wheels are truly in motion, with both the Executive Board and the Organising Committee
355 working hard to ensure that all arrangements and responsibilities under the Hosting Agreement are met. Following the public launch of the event in February, in March 2024 the hosting of the European Netball Under-17 Open Championships took place. The tournament served as a test event for the forthcoming World Cup. This was the first time that two venues, namely the Tercentenary Sports Hall and the Europa Sports Hall, had been used simultaneously. This tested
360 communication, logistics, transport and scheduling, amongst other things.

The visiting World Netball delegation with whom I met were extremely satisfied and confident that Gibraltar would be able to deliver on its commitments. I have to personally thank the hardworking staff of the GSLA who were present at *both* sites and ensured the success of the event.

365 Madam Speaker, parks and playgrounds also fall under my area of responsibility with these being looked after by the GSLA. In the last financial year, the maintenance programme undertaken by the GJBS crew in conjunction with the GSLA team continues, and the effects of the work undertaken are becoming very noticeable.

Maintenance has now become more proactive, and when items do become damaged, as they
370 inevitably do, reaction times for repairs have decreased significantly. The rolling maintenance programme is seasonal and based on usage trends; however, all areas are checked regularly to ensure that they are safe. The total cost of this in the last financial year was £210,145.64.

It is at this point that I do have to unfortunately report that we are suffering regular spates of
375 vandalism to park and playground equipment. These areas are frequented daily by Gibraltar's children and equipment is damaged intentionally on far too regular a basis and for no reason whatsoever. As a community, we must not fall into this trap. Ultimately, public funds, our money, goes into addressing these spates of vandalism.

In addition to the maintenance programme, the Moorish Castle playground was relocated. The park was re-provided in another area within the estate at a cost of £70,603.92. Other parks and
380 playgrounds have also received specific equipment upgrades, with a total in the last financial year for this being £73,944.65.

Madam Speaker, summer 2023 was a particularly busy period with both the Bathing Pavilion and the Europa Pool, with maintenance and upgrades to both amenities being undertaken to facilitate this. The overall cost for maintenance was as follows: GSLA Bathing Pavilion,
385 £156,771.46; and the Europa Pool, £41,106.75. These figures account for cleaning, maintenance and repairs, including the services of divers required before, during and after the summer season.

While the summer season lasts approximately 14 weeks, these areas need to be looked at or looked after all year round.

390 Both facilities have now become staples for those who do not wish to or cannot access our
beaches. Both are fully accessible and cater for those members of our community with mobility
issues.

Madam Speaker, the Summer Sports Programme made up of Sports Train and Stay and Play
programme continues to bridge the gap between the normally quiet summer months of the year.
Now in 25th and 15th year respectively, the schemes continue to go from strength to strength.
395 Madam Speaker, the 2023 GSLA Sports Dream Programme experienced tremendous success and
made significant improvements to enhance participation and inclusivity.

The decision to shift the start time to 9 a.m. and implement online registrations proved to be
instrumental in achieving a record number of registrations, exceeding 800 participants, of
which 30 declared the need for additional support. Partnering with Possibilities to support
400 children from the LSF Unit further underscores the programme's commitment to accessibility and
integration, providing crucial support for the initiative's success.

Additionally, 24 individuals completed the Level 1 Community Sports Leadership Award, and
subsequently volunteered for the programme for the remainder of the summer. The Family Fun
evenings remained constantly successful, drawing in large numbers of families.

405 The use of the Lathbury Sports Complex for the first time not only breathed new life into the
programme, but also provided a central and accessible location for activities, enhancing the
overall experience for participants. Expanding the range of sports offered, including new games
like ultimate frisbee, track and field events, and swimming, undoubtedly broadened the appeal of
the programme, catering to a diverse range of interests among the participants.

410 Overall, the 2023 GSLA Sports Train programme's success can be attributed to its proactive
approach to addressing barriers of participation, its expansion of sports offerings, and its strategic
use of facilities to create a vibrant and inclusive environment for children of all backgrounds and
abilities.

Integrated well-being workshops and assisting well-being leads within each group further
415 demonstrates a commitment to supporting the holistic development of the young leaders who
assume a great responsibility throughout the programme. This year, the programme will also be
starting at the early time of 9 a.m., to align with school schedules, ensuring a smooth transition
for participants and maximising their engagement from the outset.

However, Madam Speaker, the Summer Sports Programme are not the only tasks that the
420 GSLA's Sports Development Unit undertake during the year. Aside from regulating and assisting
sports associations throughout the year and assisting new associations, the Sports Development
Unit is actively involved in delivering safeguarding training.

During the last financial year, 348 coaches and volunteers have undertaken safeguarding
training, meaning that there are now a total of 673 individuals who have an active safeguarding
425 certificate.

The subject of child protection must be and is at the forefront of everything that is done in
relation to children and young people and their participation in sports and leisure. However,
enforcement has to align with education, and during the last year scores of unannounced
safeguarding spot checks have taken place by GSLA staff.

430 Madam Speaker, I would like to end my contribution on sports and leisure by mentioning the
GSLA staff. It has been just over eight months since I became Minister, and it has been a pleasure
to get to know them and to see what they do day in, day out from a different perspective. We
have had very constructive meetings and morale is high, something which I will vow to help
maintain. I need to thank them all for being so open and welcoming. It is a pleasure and an honour
435 to work with them.

Madam Speaker, in concluding, I cannot explain how proud I am to present my first Budget
speech. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of staff who work within
every ministry for which I hold ministerial portfolios.

440 I would also like to thank you and your staff here in Parliament for the help and assistance
given to fulfil my parliamentary obligations. But, Madam Speaker, I could not end my budget

speech without specifically mentioning the staff at the ministry: Alison, Dylan, Jaydan, Chernade and Demelza. Without them, I would not be able to run the portfolios that I lead on.

I have always seen the world in a more introspective and thoughtful way. I am a visual learner who is stubborn and never gives up, a contrarian by nature. Yet their patience and understanding is unwavering.

A wholehearted thank you also goes to the Chief Secretary, Financial Secretary, DCM, Chief Minister and my colleagues.

Madam Speaker, I am very aware that despite my opening statement on the negative side of public life, we also have to acknowledge that we can be a positive influence. It is important for me to be true to who I am. As my good friend would say, we are what we are.

As many may be aware, last February I recorded a podcast on 'Why Dyslexia', which was aired last week. Madam Speaker, I hope that having parliamentarians like me and the Hon. Joelle Ladislaus talking openly about our experiences and our unique strengths will be an inspiration to anyone who is struggling or doubting themselves. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. C A Saccarello.

Hon. C A Saccarello: Madam Speaker, in my first Budget speech, I would like to acknowledge how privileged I feel to be in this Chamber, participating in our democratic process. I would also like to thank you and the parliamentary team for the kind welcome and support I have received since last October.

Similarly, I would like to thank the public, to whom I am indebted for their generous votes on polling day. It is a debt I do not take lightly. Indeed, it is a responsibility I shall shoulder for the duration of my term in Opposition. To this end, I shall be unrelenting in my questioning and holding to account of those across the floor as I have been elected and employed to do so. I shall do this unashamedly but also professionally.

As Shadow Minister with special responsibility for civic and community engagements, I have spent the last eight months or so quizzing many in our community on exactly what their concerns are when it comes to how the Government spends taxpayers' money. Of course, the community has many other disquiets, but as this is a Budget session I will focus on their feedback regarding their money.

The responses I have received consistently, unambiguously and clearly have fallen into three categories. Firstly, is taxpayers' money being spent wisely? They are asking if we are getting good value for money. Is it being distributed fairly across the board? And is there transparency as to where and how it is being spent?

Secondly, are Government investments protecting Gibraltarians' long-term future? We are told the Government often borrows for capital expenditure. If Government is borrowing on behalf of our children, then it is imperative that every penny is invested in securing their future, whether it be for our children's affordable housing, our children's environment or our children's economic prospects.

Thirdly, are Gibraltar's assets being sold at the right time, for the right price and for the right reasons?

As these are the overriding concerns of our community, I shall use these criteria to attempt to guide me in the assessment of my shadow portfolios. But before analysing the business portfolio, I briefly would like to touch on the economy generally to view the context in which our businesses are operating.

Although the Government has outlined that our large GDP per capita has grown this year, it could sensibly be argued that this is not the most useful metric for a small economy, with a huge proportion of cross-border workers who are not included in the *per capita* figure but who nonetheless contribute to the gross domestic products.

So, in order to assess our economy's performance, perhaps more relevant metrics might be:

(1) Has the tax revenue increased year-on-year in real terms? The answer to this is no, and it is predicted to fall this year.

495 (2) Are we doubling down on debt and reducing the next generation's burden? The answer to this again is no, despite a small commitment to reduce debt by 10% of the Budget surplus, a minuscule amount by comparison.

(3) Has the value of assets owned by Government increased or decreased? We are never given sight of a balance sheet, but we can reasonably assume that the value of individual buildings or individual tracts of land have increased during the tenure of this Government because of the
500 increase in land and property values. Crucially, though, the number of buildings owned, the acreage of land owned and the number of assets generally has significantly diminished. A quick glance at the Budget Book illustrates the annual financial recurring burden to the taxpayer causes a direct effect of this Government's policy of renting office and even school space, as opposed to repurposing and refurbishing property we already own. Yet the Hon. Chief Minister claimed in his
505 Budget speech opening statement that our land is one of our key assets.

(4) Is the individual voter and other business owners feeling the pinch factor? The average person in Gibraltar is suffering from the effects of inflation, social insurance rises, fiscal drag by tax bands not being increased with inflation, unaffordable housing costs, rising energy prices, huge traffic fines at £300 a pop, and a Government which is out of touch with their everyday struggles.

510 The average business owner is absorbing exorbitant rents and increased costs; is faced with a stagnant market; and is paralysed by uncertainty. The pinch, I suggest, is certainly being felt.

On the topic of business, I would like to offer my congratulations to John-Paul Fa on his appointment as CEO to the newly merged Business and OFT Departments, and I wish him well, Madam Speaker, in his new challenge.

515 Joined-up thinking, inter-departmental co-ordination and a focused mission is what every business strives to perfect, so it makes sense for the Government's administrative support function itself to also share these aims. The business community awaits in eager anticipation for these synergies to be delivered.

520 Yesterday's announcement of the Strategic Plan for Business by Minister Arias-Vasquez was, on the surface, a welcome piece of news. Finally, the Department of Business has come up with a strategy.

At first glance, the strategy appears simple in its objectives. But to transform a glossy brochure and good intentions into successful achievement will not be easy. It will take a lot more than hard work to achieve, and I wish her and her Department good luck with the task ahead.

525 The Minister has now set a benchmark upon which the Government's relative success or failure can be measured; and we perhaps more importantly, the business community, will be monitoring progress closely.

530 Aside from uncertainty, another deterrent to economic growth is the lack of access to funding for developing businesses. There is a dearth of institutional funding available for short- and medium-term loans in Gibraltar, and personal or angel investors are hard to come by, particularly for smaller amounts which enable more modest business growth.

The Government has recently launched its Gibraltar Enterprise Scheme, which is supported by two local financial institutions. The jury remains out on its effectiveness as to the breadth and number of companies its net can support, given the initial low uptake. Further, this scheme is not
535 accessible to companies over three years old, and the loan amounts are capped at £25,000.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that the Government urgently looks at all options to enable business to grow, including leaning on our financial institutions to provide business a better, faster and generally more supportive service. Put quite simply, access to finance and even to simple bank accounts is not fast enough nor good enough.

540 The GFSB has been busy implementing its new strategy, witnessing greater levels of activity and output, diversifying its offering and growing its membership. This strategic focus has led to a number of logistical changes in the operations. The Federation has increased membership

engagement, making it, as a result, a much better advocate for business. Chairman Owen Smith, in his recent annual dinner speech, highlighted as a major concern the uncertainty brought about by the stalling Brexit negotiations, which is resulting in a lack of investment for growth, calling it the single biggest issue for business.

The Chairman stated that businesses were finding it much harder to plan for an agreement than for a non-negotiated outcome. Their keynote speaker, FSB Northern Ireland Chairman, Roger Pollen, stated that their very active involvement in delivering the Northern Ireland Protocol saw them adopt an approach whereby no cohort, no sector was an acceptable casualty. If only local retailers, Madam Speaker, could enjoy the confidence of this mantra.

The GFSB's reaction to the recent Budget measures was one of concern. They stated it has simply increased the burden on business through the 20% relative increase in Corporate Tax, and through the above-inflation raise in social insurance. In requesting a more balanced budget where the burden is shared with other sectors, they echo the thoughts of the business community in calling for greater efficiency in Government services, incentives to stimulate investment, growth and job creation through tax relief and other measures.

The Chamber of Commerce, meanwhile, has recently produced an in-depth and well-researched tourism manifesto which provides a suggested strategy to unlock the potential opportunities that this particular sector or economy could and should be delivering. In this document, the Chamber pinpoints the importance of transport as key to its success, where connectivity and visitor management are clear and optimised.

The Chamber's response to this year's budgetary measures is also critical in nature. Similar to the GFSB, they claim that it places a further and unwanted burden on the private sector in the climate of higher interest rates. Their main areas of critique are that there are no material measures to assist business or attract investment, that the measures simply serve to add to the upwardly spiralling costs of doing business, that there are poor budgetary controls, and that all these punitive measures are seen to be plugging the hole created through continued Government inefficiencies. The Chamber highlights waste as a long-heralded problem and urges the Government to clamp down on unnecessary expenditure, describing some Departments' overspend as sizable and worrying, to say the least.

Madam Speaker, it is essential that the Government not only pays lip service to these business-sector bodies, which are a hub of business expertise, but that they act on the professional advice provided, and act swiftly.

In 2014, this Government introduced anti-bullying legislation via the Employment (Bullying at Work) Act, without any consultation with the trade bodies, and only with the union. When encouraged to apply a fair and equitable approach to both unions and trade bodies in similar future circumstances, the Chief Minister's response was a resounding no. His justification being that he was a socialist and would always side with the worker.

Whilst we completely support the need for anti-bullying measures, we also believe that a Government of all the people should not be dismissive of one side. We believe the Government should be batting for Team Gibraltar, Madam Speaker, representing both sides fairly and equitably. After all, one cannot survive without the other.

The value of small businesses cannot be underestimated. Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, as the Chamber attests. They contribute around 75% of Income Tax and virtually all Corporate Tax and import duty. It would be wise to remember that it is the Government's responsibility to act with surgical precision when increasing taxation on business, as the balance between raising extra tax revenue and pushing companies over the limits and to the wall is precariously set.

Conversely, if we help businesses thrive, we can create jobs whilst also advocating and legislating for the best possible working conditions for their employees, fostering greater levels of economic growth and prosperity.

On the topic of inward investment, there is ample anecdotal evidence to demonstrate a decline. The lack of a solid economic blueprint, coupled with the uncertainty brought about by

595 Brexit, of course, have caused a wobble in inward investment. Neither the Government, the
Opposition, nor the people of Gibraltar bear any portion of the blame for Brexit itself. That goes
without saying.

But a lack of clarity where our intended landing pad lies, the fact that the Chief Minister's
negotiations have been shrouded in a cloak of secrecy, and of course the lack of finality, have led
600 to a growing unease which continues to fester the longer the Government remains unable get the
deal across the line.

Their inability to close the deal, despite being 0.01% away, according to the Chief Minister's
election claim, has recently heightened uncertainty, which in turn has led to a partial paralysis of
the economy, Madam Speaker. Company directors and shareholders are fearful of blindly
605 investing in growth without the security of a return, and where we are faced with the reality that
new investors have been holding off for years now, waiting for the right moment to invest or, even
more worryingly, are perhaps investing elsewhere.

This is reflected in the 2.3% decrease in Corporate Tax revenues raised, despite a recent year-
on-year relative rise in Corporate Tax levels of 25%. And is further displayed by a steady decline in
610 new company formations in general, as shown by the register at Companies House. The years
between 2021 and 2024 show a steady decline, with a small post-COVID increase blip. The figures
do not lie, Madam Speaker.

The number of company incorporations between 2022 and 2024 have dropped an average of
28% under this Government, and there is no clearer reflection than this of the lack of confidence
615 across the economy in the poor platform for business presented by this Government. This growing
lack of confidence in our economy needs to be urgently addressed and reversed.

In applying my tests as to if money has been well spent, whether Government investments are
protecting our future, and whether Government assets are being wisely managed, I am afraid the
numbers often simply cannot be followed. For example, £26 million is contributed to the Gibraltar
620 Development Corporation, £11.8 million of which is transferred to the Economic Development
and Employment Ltd. The trail ends here.

It is one of the many Government-owned companies where taxpayers' money disappears into
an abyss. The sets of accounts published for Government-owned companies fall way short of
providing a clear picture into the movement and destination of funds.

625 The Chief Minister, defending the shortage of real data, offers us 'They are not Government',
by way of defence, yet these very companies are born of public funds. Where this money is spent,
how much is wasted and how fairly it is allocated is completely unknown as it is carefully and
purposefully hidden from public view in a jungle of companies. How can we, or any member of
the public, 'Follow the numbers', to quote the Chief Minister?

630 Moving on to fiscal stimulus. Investment in and encouragement of the construction sector has
long become a trademark of this Government's fiscal stimulus attempts. While a common and
useful economic tool, Government's current strategic approach to its investment in social and
affordable housing is flawed in a number of ways. First, fiscally, the injection of financial stimulus
into our economy is relatively short-lived. We have a small labour pool who are trained to work in
635 that sector.

The lack of concerted focus and investment in the trades at apprenticeship level results in the
bleeding of a large part of this stimulus as workers take their wages over the border.

Whilst we, on this side of the House, are strong advocates for affordable housing to both
purchase and rent, we do not believe the existing model properly provides for the housing needs
640 of the next generations. Practically, the investment of taxpayers' money to subsidise affordable
housing does not currently provide a long-term solution, as it is only affordable for a snapshot in
time. The reality is that on receipt of the keys, the newly acquired properties quickly shoot up in
value-to-market rates, rendering them instantly unaffordable to the average earner, thus
perpetuating the need for continued construction for each generation to come. Simply
645 impracticable as a sustainable solution.

With Government developments taking between five and 10 years to complete, we are running out of time, space and money. The Government is chasing its tail or, put another way, running the bath without the plug in. An alternative strategy needs to be found.

650 There are other ways to stimulate an economy and we need to have a multipronged approach moving forward rather than simply focusing on the few areas that have been cash cows in the past. There is a growing amount of unrest within the workforce of several of the areas I shadow, Madam Speaker.

655 The postal services recently suffered from an acute episode of ‘jobs for the boys’, a deeply rooted systemic failing of this Administration and one that appears to have little remedy, despite its severe side effects. Fortunately, union and worker involvement has temporarily staved off the parachuting-in of a couple of enchufes, in detriment to those other 14 workers who were equally – if not better – qualified and who had a much longer service history within the Department, but it may only be resolved temporarily. The other contenders await with trepidation.

660 The GEA has also very recently witnessed a ‘go slow’ by part of its workforce, who were not happy with their hazardous working conditions, poor equipment and a lack of investment in the maintenance and upgrade of their vehicle fleet, part of a long list of issues. It goes without saying that the safety of our workforce must be treated as a priority, but we must also highlight the requirement to invest in training to ensure that our electrical technicians are kept up to date with rapidly developing technologies and systems. The industrial action is symptomatic, Madam Speaker, of the Government failing to listen to the demands of the workforce and failing to invest in key areas of Infrastructure. **(Two Members: Hear, hear.)**

670 It is clear that there has been a breach of trust which must be addressed without delay and the solution, I suggest, must go well beyond platitudes. It is imperative that the public sector workforce is given the due care and support that they deserve. No more jobs for the boys; no more holding back on investment in training and equipment; and no more hidden agendas.

675 Madam Speaker, on the topic of investment in infrastructure, as I mentioned in May’s parliamentary session, a broad brushstroke calculation of new developments already in the pipeline will see the construction of approximately 6,000 new residential apartments over the next few years. That is a broad brushstroke.

This is the immediate future in infrastructural terms we are speaking about. These figures do not include smaller developments, nor commercial premises. So conservatively speaking, with an average of three persons per apartment, 18,000 people, an average of 150 litres of wastewater per day, our sewers would have to deal with an additional 2.7 million litres of wastewater per day.

680 The Government’s response to my Question on infrastructural investment was not one that inspired confidence. No figures were known nor cited on present capacity levels and chokepoints, never mind figures on future demands, but perhaps they will be revealed shortly.

685 Madam Speaker, it is crucial that Government fulfils its responsibilities and plans for and invests in the infrastructural upgrades required to future-proof our economic and population growth, even when the investment is not easily recognisable by the public. It need not be an obvious vote-winner to warrant pre-emptive action.

690 Whilst on the subject of AquaGib, I note that the Hon. Chief Minister confirmed to the House that the remaining 50% shares of AquaGib to be purchased from Northumbrian Water would be repurchased from Northumbrian Water soon, a deal that is hoped to be struck by the end of the summer. This side of the House — as many others — will remain vigilant as to how this will be funded, whether or not this offers good value for money to the taxpayer and whether the Government intends on retaining all, some or none of its shares as part of its strategy. Perhaps the Hon. Chief Minister in his response could offer a little clarity on how this is being funded.

695 Similar arguments around lack of value-for-money investments in our infrastructure can be extended to our power distribution, where network upgrades are patchy at best and we still suffer from regular interruptions to our power supply. We welcome the investment in the BESS battery system in principle, although we do not know the exact details of funding again. These batteries should address some of the supply issues we currently face, but we also strongly advocate for the

planning and delivery of a comprehensive upgrade of the distribution network, whose issues continue unchecked, to eradicate these problematic power cuts.

700 The residential and business sectors can all rightly expect a continuous, uninterrupted power supply in this day and age, especially when over £70 million of their money has been spent on a new power station.

Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister, I am sure, will wax lyrical on the virtues of their choice of investment over the GSD's — indeed, we already heard he had —but when the waxing wanes and the dust settles, the public will still be left with the bare-naked truth, that the power cuts have not gone away and remain as ever present as they were since 2011.

705 Equally, we strongly recommend a reduction in our environmental footprint through the wider and more comprehensive use of green technologies in power production. The GSLP Liberal Government has failed to meet previously established EU targets on clean energy production as a carbon reduction measure. Investment in the development of renewable energies would provide Gibraltar with greater security, as we would reduce our independence on the volatile prices of fossil fuels, especially within the context of increasing global destabilisation.

710 As yet, very little has been achieved in this area, with photovoltaic technology being the only solution currently on offer, providing a mere 2% of our energy requirements at its peak. With no strategy for diversification into alternative technologies on the table, a viable solution remains years away. This reflects, in my opinion, poor value for money from a taxpayer's perspective. While on the topic of the environmental impact of our utilities, the GSD advocates a need for much greater urgency to the start and completion of a sewage plant and a long-awaited cessation to the dumping of untreated effluence directly into our seas.

715 On the topic of e-Gov, reduction in administration is proven to incentivise business formation and indeed expansion. The Hon. Minister for Health, Care and Business recently gave a talk at the GFSB annual dinner, in which she described her own administration's e-Gov solution for business as 'clunky'. Three-quarters of a year into this current Administration and nearly 13 years since they began, there still appears to be no one-stop shop, no Government portal for businesses to register their company in one place and apply to all the relevant and separate Government entities, such as employment, business licensing, tax and other such requirements. The current Hon. Minister's predecessor claimed at the recent general election that their one-stop shop service was complete and operational, when clearly it was nothing more than a mirage.

720 I understand that work is in progress to develop a system which simplifies the application process, which we would encourage. We also advocate the development of a more comprehensive e-Gov solution which provides the user — the business, in this instance — with one point of contact where their query is subsequently sent to the relevant Department to respond accordingly. The system must be made to work in a way beyond initial administrative setup, but as a portal for continued business support and further development. This way businesses will be able to focus on their priorities, such as growth, while Government will optimise its revenues into Treasury.

730 Madam Speaker, we strongly urge the Government to turn its attention to the business community's needs and to ensure that the relevant Government Departments are also sufficiently supported and resourced to deliver this service. With escalating red tape costs, it is only a fair and equitable trade that the process is made easier. Efficiency is the order of the day.

740 In conclusion, there is evidence across all of my portfolios of inefficiencies, wastage and poor value for money. Glaringly obvious is a repeated lack of transparency as to how and where taxpayers' money has been spent. There is little evidence that investments have been sustainably made and public borrowing appears to be to the detriment of rather than in the interests of our children.

745 At this critical juncture in our history, investment in the economy means thinking out of the box and planning strategically for our future. It means embracing emerging technologies and industries, targeted investment in education and apprenticeships, robustly growing our tourism product, while offering support and clarity for existing businesses.

750 There is a real concern about our diminishing asset base. The community has watched year on year building after building and inch after inch of our land being sold off. After the selling of all of the family silver, I am being asked, 'What is left for the next generation?'

Over the centuries, Gibraltarians have always been quick to adapt to change and have been resilient in times of adversity. Now is the time to listen to our people and to do the right thing by them, so that they can prosper long into our future.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker: The Hon. P A Orfila.

760 **Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, in delivering my maiden speech as a Government Minister, firstly I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who voted for me and have given me the privilege and opportunity of leading the Housing Department as the Minister for Housing. My current responsibilities are housing and the University of Gibraltar, both very close to my heart.

765 Among the many goals I have set myself are the launching of the amended Housing Act and the revised Housing Allocations Scheme, which is now ready and brings the scheme into the 21st century. There is also the Rent-and-Repair Scheme, which I am sure will be very popular among those who do not want to keep waiting on the housing waiting list and do not mind entering into a Rent-and-Repair Scheme. This scheme will enable the buildings that have fallen
770 into disrepair to be brought back to life again. There are many of these buildings dotted all over Gibraltar and I want to offer them as a project for those who feel that they can embark on such a venture.

We need to understand that the buildings which will be offered are not for sale. They shall be repaired by interested parties, but they will always remain as part of our Government housing stock. Presently we are working with lawyers to produce an agreement that will be signed by the interested parties. The people who are eligible for this will be those who are on the Government housing waiting list and the composition of rooms will be applicable depending on circumstance.

775 There will be no payment of rent for a period of time, which will compensate the expense incurred. The scheme, Madam Speaker, will ensure that houses that have been left to die a slow and painful death will now be able to have life breathed into them again. This is an initiative that I am very excited about.

I now turn to the Housing Allocations Scheme, Madam Speaker. This was first amended by the GSLP in 1994 and now, after 30 years, it is time for it to be brought into sync with the changes and progress of the society in which we live today. The amendments will make the scheme fairer and will flag up those who need it the most. It will also provide a clearer picture of the applicant's position and their needs. The scheme will now better reflect the applicant's position within the Housing Waiting List.

785 The Housing Allocation Committee, under the new scheme, will continue to recommend to the Department those that require to be allocated a flat due to their pressing medical conditions. The Housing Allocation Committee will now also be able to give points to other cases that are not immediate, thus giving them a better chance of being allocated a flat under the normal waiting list due to their points. Their position will be accelerated because the new pointing system will now increase their chances.

795 Presently, persons considered medical B or C have had little or no chance of getting an allocation on medical grounds. This amended scheme will now show us clearly who needs the allocation on medical grounds.

A Mental Welfare Officer has also been invited to form part of the board. We feel that this is a step in the right direction and a crucial addition to the committee. Mental health affects most of us, if not all of us, at some point in our lives and we cannot overlook this.

800 Madam Speaker, the Housing Department is fully committed to working with other Departments, Agencies and Authorities with a view to providing a seamless approach and

response to individuals with multiple and complex needs. The Department is keen to foster a holistic approach as part of its practice.

805 With regard to the allocation of flats, in the eight months since I have taken the role of Housing Minister, we have given 132 houses. However, we have received 192 new applications, which when added to the backlog of applications which this Department had – and which has now thankfully been cleared – brings the total up to 219 new applicants on the waiting list.

810 There are new ideas in the pipeline for the purpose of accelerating the handing over of houses, however. One successful initiative is the handing over of the property ‘as is’. Some tenants are more than happy to do the repairs themselves. Tenants and applicants are welcoming this initiative. Keys are collected and they renovate the flat, speeding up the handing-over process. Where necessary, we will help by providing basics, like a toilet seat or a sink or bath, if needed.

815 We are also very pleased to announce that Hassan Centenary Terraces, Phase 1, to date has given us back 27 Government rental houses and we are expecting another 37 Government flats coming back with Phase 2, giving us a total of 69 Government houses coming back into our rental stock.

I would like to add that 368 applicants of those who have purchased in Hassans were on our lists marked as suspended. Had we not invested in construction for home ownership, our waiting list today could have increased by 368 more.

820 Madam Speaker, since December 2023 the hotline has received 32 calls and we have been able to retrieve 10 flats. Other flats which have been alerted to us are going through legal procedures. At this point I would like to thank the people who call the hotline, making this possible, and I would like to encourage everyone who has any information about empty or vacant flats to call our hotline number on 20040040.

825 Madam Speaker, with housing, meeting with people, advising them or listening to them is a very important role of this Department. However, there is a very large number of people who want to see the Minister for Housing. Since October I have already seen over 270 people in my personal clinics. This is an ongoing weekly exercise. We cannot always solve the problem, but we can advise them. The Housing Manager has seen 69 people. We have conducted 31 social interviews and the Housing Allocation Committee has dealt with 85 cases.

830 Madam Speaker, I have also met with almost all tenants’ associations now from our housing estates and continue to interact with them as often as necessary. We are in constant communication with them to help address any issues that may arise. This allows us to handle matters in a faster and more efficient way, ensuring the better upkeep of our housing estates.

835 The close links that these associations have established with us has also allowed for a positive link with the Housing and Works Department. This in turn has been very positive and productive so that works can be dispatched as soon as possible.

840 We are also aware, Madam Speaker, of the antisocial behaviour in certain areas of our housing estates, usually caused by the same few tenants. We are working tirelessly with the Police and Security Services to address this and we shall persevere until it stops. To date we have received 90 emails of antisocial behaviour, which have been dealt with accordingly. And we are also pleased to announce that CCTV cameras are going to be installed in some estates, which will give tenants a sense of comfort.

Looking ahead, this is something which we would like to do in all estates eventually.

845 Recently, Madam Speaker, the Housing Department has launched through the e-Gov portal an innovative process which allows an individual to register in a Government rental property for the sole purpose of renewal of documentation without eligibility to tenancy or residency. This new process is fully integrated with the e-Services portal. This, Madam Speaker, will help individuals who need to renew important documentation such as medical cards and ID etc., always of course with consent of the tenant, thus ensuring that genuine cases are dealt with promptly.

850 At this point I would like to thank the various stakeholders – e-Services, LPS, CSRO, The Hub and No. 6 Convent Place – for working together with the Housing Department in order to achieve this most important step in the right direction for so many who need it.

855 The Ministry for Digital and Financial Services and the Housing Department have also launched six new online forms for various services. They include: (1) Application for Government accommodation; (2) Application for re-accommodation; (3) Application for government pensioner exchange; (4) Application to exclude persons on tenancy; (5) Application to include persons on tenancy; and (6) Online payment of rent.

860 These services are amongst the most used by our citizens and because they are now fully integrated into the Housing Department back office system, it makes the application process more streamlined and easier to manage. These services, Madam Speaker, can be accessed via the e-Gov portal.

865 Madam Speaker, true to my manifesto commitment, I have improved the daily dealings of the public with the Department. Not only are counters now open every day of the week from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., but tenants will now also be able to come in any day of the week from Monday to Friday to pay their rent. We have increased this from one general counter and one rent counter to two general counters and one rent payment counter. The latter can be accessed every day, unlike before when the rent counter only opened two days during the week.

870 We have made coming into our offices much more user friendly by building three new enclosed cubicle counters, all of which have been soundproofed, cater for disability and which allow people to sit in the comfort of a private cubicle and interact with the member of the Department without being overheard by anyone else.

875 Madam Speaker, tenants can also access the Housing and Works Reporting Office now on the 9th floor of the ICC building. The Housing and Works Reporting Office was on the 10th floor. This allows Works issues/complaints to be addressed directly to someone from Housing and Works and not just a voice at the end of a phone line.

Housing and Works will be there every day from 9 a.m. to 12 midday. They can still, however, be accessed via phone if tenants want to call instead of coming in.

880 These refurbishment works have vastly improved services and Government would like to thank both the public and our staff for their patience and support during this hectic interim period. We will keep working hard to ensure that communication with the Housing Department will not be an onerous task. We also have an email address should they want to reach us without coming into the office. That is MHGU@gibraltar.gov.gi.

885 Madam Speaker, the Housing Department has signed a data-sharing agreement with the Department of Social Security, as well as other Departments, Agencies and authorities to ensure proper cross-communication with the said entities. This allows for more streamlined processes and procedures as well as assisting prospective applicants and tenants with applications.

890 Information relevant to certain benefits applicable to processing and eligibility of rent relief will be received by the Housing Department directly from the DSS. Housing will then be able to assist the tenant in a more automated manner, and in turn allow for the reduction of housing rent arrears.

895 Madam Speaker, we have also introduced direct debit. Letters have already gone out to all our tenants, should they want to take advantage of this. The Housing Department has been working with both the banks and the Treasury Department to set this up. This system will not only allow for another secure method of payment, but also streamline and facilitate services for our tenants as well as for all Departments.

900 Tenants will only be required to set up the direct debit once and not have to amend their instruction to the bank every time there is a yearly rent increase or changes in tenancy or parking etc. This new process will also reduce the long queues experienced at our counters. More tenants are paying online and invoices via emails are on the increase, therefore reducing paper waste.

Amounts collected in rent for the year 2022-23 was £5,030,405.77; and in 2023-24 it was £5,152,285.55. The Housing Department has therefore collected £121,879.78 more rent in 2023-24 than in 2022-23, and therefore there has also been an increase in payments. We have had 678 more payments than in 2023.

905 Madam Speaker, this Department is also working diligently in the recovery of rent arrears and we are working to find ways in which we can facilitate payment for those who must pay their rent arrears. We are committed to our people and the taxpayer has every right to ask certain people to pay their rent, like most of us do. (**Members:** Hear, hear.)

910 At this point I must praise the best part of our tenants, who do pay their rent religiously every month, and they make up for about 90% of our housing tenants, but I want to assure them that we shall continue to tackle those who are in arrears. Genuine cases will be helped, but we shall take legal action against those who are blatantly ignoring their obligation to pay rent.

915 Madam Speaker, the way certain houses are handed back to the Housing Department is totally unacceptable. We need to look after taxpayers' money and make people accountable and make them responsible. We are working to introduce a system in due course that when tenants terminate or exchange a tenancy agreement, the tenants will have to commit to certain conditions of return.

920 Madam Speaker, the state that some Government houses are returned to us is deplorable and in some cases contravenes health and safety standards and we cannot and will not tolerate this. It also means that houses take much longer to be refurbished to acceptable standards for the next tenant. Tenants are duty bound to look after their Government homes. Hopefully this system will save money and accelerate the waiting timeframe.

925 Madam Speaker, I now turn to the wonderful work which is done by our Housing and Works Agency: 98 flats to date have been completely refurbished during 2023-24; there has been in excess of 100 works orders for the occupational therapy; they have responded to 2,074 after-hours emergency work callouts and 1,419 callouts during working hours; there have been over 6,000 general work orders pertaining to maintenance and ongoing works in our properties. We must not forget that we have 5,000 properties on our books and we maintain these properties on the inside as well as on the outside.

930 Presently we are refurbishing Knights Court, St. John's Court, Tankerville House, Macmillan House and Varyl Begg Phase 1. External refurbishments to Varyl Begg Phase 2, 3 and 4, Arengos, Willis House and Coelho House are still to be done.

935 Madam Speaker, our estates matter and we want to ensure that they will be kept in good condition. And at this point, I would also like to remind the tenants who live in our estates that they too play an important role in the upkeep of their estates.

The Housing Act will also be ready very soon. I set up a working group with all stakeholders, including landlords' associations and Action for Housing, so that I could personally hear their views and take them on board. We have been meeting in order to make the necessary amendments required.

940 The Housing Act was last amended in 2007 and has been an ongoing thing with successive Governments, but it is now very close to being presented. The key is finding the correct balance, one which is in keeping with today's changing society and addressing everyone's needs in order to achieve a fairer outcome.

945 In my closing statement I must relay the immense pride that I feel in looking back to what my party has achieved. Clearly we shall be told that housing continues to be a tale of doom and gloom, but it is not a tale of doom and gloom, as the hon. Members opposite would like us to believe. Of course for some we will have doom and gloom, but we are working very hard to try and bring sunshine into their lives and get the solutions very soon.

950 This Government has built and continues to build more houses for its people than any other Government has ever done in the history of this Parliament. Whereas in most places in the world young people only dream about becoming homeowners, our young people are becoming homeowners.

955 It is true that COVID delayed construction, but not just here in Gibraltar, it put the whole world on hold. The truth is that this Government delivers on the housing front. The determined efforts of this Government to provide our community with excellent affordable homes cannot be

dismissed. The successful construction of Hassan Centenary Terraces has resulted in a magnificent skyline that demonstrates this Government's commitment to housing.

960 Every time one enters or exits Kingsway Tunnel, which incidentally was also completed and built by this Government, you will be in awe of the magnificent buildings which stand as a striking symbol and reminder of the GSLP continued accomplishments in providing exceptional affordable housing for our people of Gibraltar. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) This, Madam Speaker, whether our hon. Members across the floor like it or not, will always and forever be for them a sore reminder of the GSLP's legacy and track record when it comes to housing.

And that, Madam Speaker, is a fact.

965 I would like to end by thanking all the voluntary organisations that we work with. They provide an invaluable service to our Department and our community. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Department, to my ministerial staff and to the Housing and Works Agency, and all those who work behind the scenes, for their complete dedication to duty and service.

970 To each one of them, and they know who they are, a huge thank you. Without you all, my job would be impossible. For your sterling application and commitment, I will be forever grateful.

I would also like to thank you, Madam Speaker, and your very hardworking team for all their invaluable work and for making parliamentary sessions so much more bearable. Thank you for the coffee and biscuits. (*Laughter*)

975 Lastly, once again, my eternal gratitude must go to the people of Gibraltar who voted for me and have given me this opportunity. Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

Madam Speaker, I now turn to the university portfolio. (*Laughter*) Just when you thought it was over. This is indeed very close to my heart. Education is the profession of my choice. Teaching in our schools is where I spent my time teaching most of you here. (*Laughter*) This is an area which I am passionate about and which I know back to front.

980 A university was very much needed in Gibraltar for local students who might not have wanted to or could not go away to further their education in the UK. Thanks to this Government this is now possible. We really did need the University.

985 Despite its relatively young age, Madam Speaker, the University of Gibraltar continues to establish itself internally, regionally and locally as an institution of teaching, learning and research excellence. Next year will mark the University's 10th anniversary. How time has flown.

990 As of 31st March 2024, the university had enrolled 593 students for the academic year ending 31st July 2024, across a diverse range of academic programmes, professional and including educational courses, language courses and technical training courses. The number of academic programmes offered by the university has continued to expand, with undergraduate degrees now offered in maritime science, computing and entrepreneurship, nursing and business, all supported by a range of access courses and post-graduate degrees offered in management and leadership, research (PhD), education, business, gaming, maritime science, environmental science and healthcare.

995 New programmes offered this past year included: a part-time Master's in Education degree for local educators; an MSc in Environmental Science and Climate Change; an MSc Contemporary Healthcare degree; an MBA in Gaming; a Level 4 Teaching Certificate.

1000 Since launching its first academic taught programmes – BBA and MSc in Maritime Science – in September 2018 with a combined total of 30 students, the number of students undertaking academic programmes at the university has continued to grow year on year, with 280 students enrolled in the current academic year. It is also pleasing to see that almost 60% of all academic students are local, and the remaining 40% being international students from across the globe and representing 53 different nationalities.

1005 Madam Speaker, following extensive consultation with industry and completion of a rigorous UK validation process, the next academic year will see a further three new degrees offered by the university: MSc Sustainable Maritime Operations, a BSc (Hons) in Mental Health Nursing, and an MSc in Advanced Health Practice.

1010 The close collaboration of the university with the GHA in terms of workforce planning needs and the resulting increase in the number of students being educated in healthcare at the university, has meant that the current on-campus nursing simulation suite has become too small to provide the necessary practice for clinical skills students needed.

1015 However, recognising the essential service that the university is providing to the Gibraltar community with these programmes, the university was recently able to attract funding from the private sector, Kusuma Trust – and we are *very* grateful for this – for the complete refurbishment of the top floor of its North Wing, the old St Christopher’s building, to establish a state of the art simulator for training of health practitioners, complete with a six-bedded ward, a High Dependency Unit and a Rehabilitation Unit, together with classrooms. This in turn has addressed one of the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023 commitments.

1020 The CERG, Centre of Excellence in Responsible Gaming, has continued to grow in its reputation both locally and globally. This past year CERG provided numerous public lectures, in collaboration with Yale University, to the gaming industry and delivered 40 presentations at international conferences. They are doing well.

1025 In addition to its academic programmes, of course, the university has provided, through its Professional Development Department, a range of professional development, continuing education and CPD-accredited short courses, all aimed at addressing local needs and covering topics that include Gibraltar law, accounting, insurance, introduction to management, management communication in action, and creative thinking and problem solving.

1030 The university has also acted as an exam centre for the professional awards such as AAT, the Association of Accounting Technicians; and ACCA, Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. In March 2024, the university was awarded the AAT Small Training Provider of the Year as part of the United Kingdom category for the quality of the tutor delivery, its excellent virtual learning environment, exemplary student support and high pass rates.

1035 This year also saw the Department running its second Professional Diploma of Competence in Gibraltar Financial Services. This course is the sole qualification endorsed by the GFSC and is a cross-sector qualification developed in direct consultation with the local regulator and industries.

1040 Madam Speaker, the University Language Centre has had another busy year providing in-house English classes to 136 local students in various businesses in Gibraltar. In addition, the centre has provided intensive English courses to two groups of Japanese students from Chiba University and one group of Polish students.

1045 In terms of technical training, the University Maritime Academy has continued to grow in its reputation both locally and globally. During the last academic year, the academy’s beyond compliance fire-fighting course has been provided to an increasing number of local and international shipping operators: including Carnival UK, P&O, Cunard, Marella and Windstar, the majority of whom are attracted by the convenience of being able to dock in Gibraltar, have their crew transported by the university and typically within less than 20 minutes have their crew undertaking an Maritime Coastguard Agency approved training course at the university’s state-of-the-art training facilities, all whilst their passengers are enjoying exploring and spending money in Gibraltar.

1050 The success of this approach to training ship crew has been such that several large international cruise operators have indicated that they will be making additional calls to Gibraltar.

1055 Further, as a reflection of the growing reputation of the academy, the university were able to attract funding from the private sector, Balaena/Gibdock, for the establishment of a new state-of-the-art fire simulator for training. This in turn has addressed another of the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023 commitments. For this we are very grateful to Balaena.

1055 Despite extremely challenging targets, an increasingly competitive international market and the constraints posed by the processing delays of visas for international students, recruitment of students continues to be successful, with tuition fee incoming and increasing from £1,746,657 in the university year ending 31st July 2022, to £2,151,421 in the year ending July 2023.

Moreover, tuition income is expected to exceed £2.5 million by 31st July 2024. This growth reflects the university's ability to recruit increasing numbers of local, regional and international students attracted by the university's quality student experience.

In expanding, Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar University has not only attracted its local and regional reach but also its global reach. Key locations for all programmes include Morocco, the UK, the US, British Overseas Territories, Canada and Europe.

Under the GSLP Liberal Manifesto 2023, it was stated that in recognition of the benefits to the Gibraltar economy of increasing the number of international students, His Majesty's Government would assist the university in its efforts to attract a wider net of international students to increase the current £5.7 million a year benefit of international students on the Gibraltar economy to approximately £12 million per year.

It was pleasing to note, therefore, that the contribution to the Gibraltarian economy from the international students alone for the year ending 31st July 2023 was £6 million and that this past academic year, as of 31st March 2024, this figure had increased to £8.3 million net. Well done, university. *(Banging on desks)*

Madam Speaker, it is also pleasing to note that the Europa Suites accommodation has seen significant occupancy, with the majority of rooms now filled by university fee-paying students.

Conclusion, Madam Speaker, and I have not coughed. *(Laughter)* The University of Gibraltar continues to achieve remarkable progress across all areas. Its academic offerings, research initiatives, professional and technical training programmes, and financial performance are robust and impactful. I extend my thanks to all our stakeholders for their unwavering support and commitment. Together, we are building a brighter future for the University of Gibraltar and our community.

I will take this opportunity to thank Vice-Chancellor Catherine Bachleda and her hardworking staff for their continuous support to education and I must congratulate them on their continued success.

Thank you very much. *(Banging on desks)*

Madam Speaker: The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I wish to note for the record, as others have done, that this happens to be my 17th address to this House. I have done so from both sides of the House. Similar to what some of my colleagues said before, I think it is only correct that we mention some previous Members of Parliament.

I am grateful to two past colleagues who, for personal reasons, chose not to stand for election this last time around. That is my friends Daniel Feetham and Elliott Phillips. I miss them and it is on occasions like these where you have your ideas when you first look at the Appropriation Bill and you bounce things off them, just to double check on yourself that you are not going haywire. So, I miss them.

And, in all honesty, I even miss a couple of colleagues that used to sit on the other side of the House. I welcome the new Members. I was not a pupil of the Hon. Pat Orfila. I was actually her colleague. We shared many a laugh. I see she is even laughing at it now. We shared many laughs. We used to congregate at break times in Bayside School and in particular staff from there. Sadly, some of our colleagues who used to share those moments with us are no longer here, so we pay tribute to them. *(Interjection)* Those memories will always stay in our mind.

In particular, two colleagues who I met, I shared many moments outside of this House, Steven Linares and Samantha Sacramento. We ended up travelling together, representing Gibraltar together. That was our mission in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

Some people sometimes wonder the value behind attending CPA conferences. Well, I have attended many conferences. I have led some delegations. I have been a member of delegations under the leadership of either Steven or Samantha. But certainly the message of unity as far as Gibraltar is concerned has always been there.

1110 In this day and age of social media, livestreaming, broadcasting and so on, you would be surprised how far around the globe the messages coming out from this Parliament will reach. Those who attempted to come to a conclusion that there is total disharmony across the floor of this House, because we cannot completely concur on the state of our nation today, on the actual state of our finances, of how best to raise revenue, on how best to spend it on what projects, that is democracy. Everyone is entitled to their views and we do have this mutual democratic respect.

1115 But because I believe that the message does go to all the four corners of the world, across the seven seas, there is one message that is unanimous across the floor of this House: we are here to serve and protect the people of Gibraltar. *(Banging on desks)*

1120 Above all, on a day like today where I wish well to those seeking election to Westminster, I send a message to them, alongside those in La Moncloa where they spend their time. I send a message to the mayors, some more amicable than others, of the surrounding areas.

Gibraltar is totally undivided. Gibraltar will stick together. Gibraltar will not give in in respect of sovereignty, jurisdiction and control, no matter what they want to do. *(Banging on desks)*

1125 If they have not heard it, I will say the answer mathematically to the power of three: sovereignty, jurisdiction and control. No, no and no. *(Banging on desks) (Interjections and laughter)* One of you come over, we will do it.

1130 Madam Speaker, so why break tradition, I have always started talking about sports-related matters and let's start on a good note. I am glad to note that the Government continues with what for what years has been a long-existing policy, and that is to assist all our local sporting bodies to overcome any foreign Government's politically-inspired attempts to block our membership of international sporting bodies.

1135 I note and I hope that, slowly but surely, international sports governing bodies will judge Gibraltar's membership applications on their own merit and that these international bodies will not shamefully allow themselves to be coerced by our neighbour's unjustified and unscrupulous arguments.

Therefore, Gibraltar's longstanding and cross-party policy of assisting sporting associations will certainly continue to receive the Opposition's wholehearted and unwavering support. We sincerely wish all our local sporting associations the very best in their continuing battles to obtain their respective international memberships, where these are still pending. It is unwavering: they are rightfully and legitimately theirs.

1140 Madam Speaker, the Opposition have made it clear that we do not consider that savers' or taxpayers' monies should be used to fund the development or construction of a new football stadium. However, subject to that, we wish the Gibraltar Football Association all the very best in their ongoing construction and upgrading of the national stadium.

1145 Victoria Stadium is, indeed, an ideal site for local sports lovers to attend and patriotically support our teams. I am sure this House remains unanimous in wishing our teams participating within European competitions all the best in their forthcoming games.

1150 The forthcoming developments at Victoria Stadium should result in an improvement to football facilities in Gibraltar. However, there is still a great need for further training facilities if our future generations are to aspire in improving their overall skills and standards. It continues to break my heart to see so many Gibraltar-registered football teams having to go over into Spain in order to train in preparation for local and international matches.

Indeed, more facilities are very much needed if we are to continue to aspire progressing beyond the qualification stages in respect of international competitions.

1155 The GSD continues to believe that, alongside the refurbished facilities which will be enjoyed by our football fraternity, there is still a greater need for extensive training facilities in order to cater for our ever-increasing number of participants in football and other sports.

1160 Unfortunately, there is still not a clear and accurate picture in respect of the GFA development of Victoria Stadium. We know that the lease has been granted to the Football Association at a price that does not reflect any commercial or residential use. It transpires that the project will not only see the construction of an UEFA approved football facility but also a project which will see

commercial and residential facilities built. The selling price for the lease is certainly not the best amount Government could have obtained as businesses with commercial and residential interests would almost certainly have offered a higher premium.

1165 The Victoria Stadium project itself has caused great debate and division not only among the football fraternity but also amongst our general public. The big questions remain.

Madam Speaker, what exactly is it that this project is trying to achieve? Will the project result in an improvement of sporting facilities for everyday use by players of all abilities? Will our youngsters benefit from improved training facilities?

1170 These facilities should ensure that the introduction and development of our youngsters into the world of sports, very often arising from our schools' sports curriculum and sporting clubs' commitments, are equally catered for. It is our collective duty to make facilities available for our public at large who wish to participate in healthy sporting activities.

Madam Speaker, I ask: is everyone clear about the funding of the Victoria Stadium project? Originally, it had been said that it would be largely funded with the help from grants issued to the GFA by UEFA. Then we had the version that the Father of this House once said: it would be funded as an investment either from Government-owned companies or maybe it was from the Savings Bank. Then this was changed, pre-election, into investments from private entities where no taxpayers' monies would be used.

1180 After the election, it has become clear that monies had been advanced by Government for the Victoria Stadium project. Firstly, we were told in this House £965,930, which we believe has been repaid, but then there follows a further loan of £524,000.

Beyond the Games themselves, the facilities were meant to enable Gibraltar sports participants to continue to achieve as best results as possible and aim for higher standards, thanks to an increase of facilities which develops their wide-ranging sporting talents.

1185 We have heard in this House of a range of excuses as to why the newly-constructed facilities at Europa Sports Complex are still not properly maintained. Our local sporting fraternity confide in me their personal opinion that there is a certain element of managerial inefficiency contributing to the now five-years delay in what was once upon a time hailed as a showcase of facilities.

1190 It is totally unacceptable that it has taken five years to agree upon a structure for the running and upkeep of sporting facilities at Europa. Different Ministers have offered different answers in this House. One Minister informed this House that a management running contract had been awarded to a newly set up entity with representatives from three well-established and stakeholder sports associations. Plus, additionally, there were nominations made directly by the Minister himself.

1195 The latest version is that we have moved into an agreement whereby the Europa facilities will be run and maintained by the Gibraltar Football Association, and apparently this will be exclusively by them. The stakeholders who were parties to the original agreement say that they were and still have not been consulted or made properly aware of matters in respect of what are now the latest arrangements.

1200 I look forward to the answer and explanations of why this managerial facility has resulted in the final version we have now.

Madam Speaker, I note that no sooner had the Rugby 7s competition finished this weekend that the GFA started to change locks at the Europa facilities. Therefore, I now ask: what are the costs of running these facilities?

1205 In our Book, Head 52, sub-head 2(7), makes provision for half a million, £500,000, under the title 'Europa Point Sports Complex'. I ask: is this a payment to be made to the GFA for running the Europa Sports Complex? Madam Speaker, what about the income to be derived from use of the Europa Sports Complex?

1210 We know there are companies using premises within the complex for private, commercial, catering and hospitality purposes. If payments are being made for use of these facilities, where is this reflected in the estimates or is that now to become an income which the GFA keeps for themselves and not reflected in any shape or form through Government accounting procedures?

1215 I ask: what staff will be employed to run the day-to-day affairs of the Europa Sports Complex?
And who will be their employer?

Furthermore, in the Improvement and Development Fund section there shows a £330,000 forecast outturn under sub-head 4, entitled 'Island Games Facilities'. Seeing that the Island Games were held in 2019 – that is five years ago – what exactly was this expense incurred?

1220 There is now zero provision for 2024-25 in this same sub-head. So is it that the works are now deemed fully completed, despite my continued reminders of failures such as the outstanding ball-stop nets at Europa Sports Ground or the provision of adequate scoreboards to keep spectators and players alike – we need to be updated as to the progress of the games being played.

1225 The Minister for Sports and I shared some time together on Saturday up at Europa and none of us were any the wiser on what the score line was, so it would certainly help middle- and old-aged men like us to keep up to date on what is happening.

1230 Madam Speaker, we have quite often obtained results in numerous sporting disciplines which make our neighbours and sporting opponents in official competitions envious of our rather good and consistent performances. I sincerely hope that the present sports facilities, when eventually fully completed and when eventually properly maintained, will meet local requirements not only for today's needs but for at least a generation to come.

1235 The latest occurrences in respect of the Europa sports facilities are that despite the GFA having secured a lease at a bargain price to enhance facilities at the Victoria Stadium, forthcoming European football competitions will have to be played at Europa. This in turn now presents a problem for other sports associations like rugby and cricket, who will see their respective allocation times enjoyed up until recently will now be greatly reduced.

1240 I offer an example: the problems to be faced by the Gibraltar Cricket Association, who are currently in preparation for the World Cup qualifiers to be played in Germany during this month of July. Gibraltar enjoys ICC membership and are, therefore, required to maintain a minimum number of leagues as well as youth and female cricket incentives.

1245 Gibraltar's men and women international teams are successfully climbing in international rankings and this is something we should be extremely proud about, given the size of our population. In my example, success in cricket not only equals but I dare say also outweighs that seen in other sports. So, therefore, Madam Speaker, I hope that cricket does not suffer the consequences which some fear could come about due to the lack of facilities and allocations.

Or, worse still, that their membership of the ICC be called into question due to not being able to meet the minimum requirements as set by the international governing body.

1250 I hope I speak for the whole House as we offer our collective best wishes to all forthcoming participants who, through their committed efforts, will hopefully yet again make Gibraltar proud of our sporting achievements in the forthcoming season which is about to commence.

1255 It is very gratifying to see that the summer sports programme continues to be a very popular facility which is enjoyed by so many youngsters during the schools' summer holidays. This original GSD programme had small beginnings and then expanded into equally successful provisions such as the introduction of what is known as Stay and Play, which caters for potential participants who, for a variety of reasons, cannot fully enjoy the mainstream programmes on offer.

1260 In this respect, I offer the Minister my full support because I believe the time has now come for a further review and expansion of programmes being offered, and we should seriously consider the introduction of bespoke activities for those youngsters who have special needs which neither fit into the mainstream or the Stay and Play facilities. If we jointly conduct a review or audit of what is currently available using the premise of sports for all, it could well be that other programmes need to be introduced for the future.

Madam Speaker, I cannot end talking about sport without paying tribute to the late Elliot – or better known Tony – Macedo, a Gibraltarian who played for Fulham, and even to this day there are still many here who support Fulham Football Club due to Tony's magnificent performance. I hope we see others taking over from him. *(Banging on desks)*

1265 I continue by saying that I wish to reaffirm my personal, as well as the GSD's communal, convictions that through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians contribute towards reinforcing our identity, our culture and our history as a people and as a community.

1270 Both the performing and fine arts fraternities have always proved themselves to be very proactive within their own specialised areas, and I take this opportunity to congratulate all the groups and individuals who have done Gibraltar extremely proud through their international participations. It is always a personal and collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we are of the achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

1275 This year's estimates show yet again a token provision of £1,000 under the Improvement and Development Fund expenditure set aside under Head 102, Other Projects, sub-head 4K or kilo, entitled 'Theatre'. It is public knowledge that the National Theatre aims to provide an enlarged theatre created within the John Mackintosh Hall complex.

1280 This theatre will be built with funds provided for by public subscriptions. The new theatre will replace the existing John Mackintosh Hall facilities, which currently has just over 200 seating capacity and which is always in great demand for use by local schools, local dance groups and so on for their productions. It still remains with a big question: where will traditional users of the existing hall be able to stage their shows?

1285 With the refurbishment of John Mackintosh Hall facilities, we are not providing much-needed additional facilities. It boils down to an exchange of a small facility for a much larger one which will not necessarily cater for ever-increasing demands of theatre facilities.

The new larger theatre might be good news for some, but it has also resulted in sad news for others, like local educational schools and dance groups for whom the existing size was just right. I wish the traditional users of the hereto existing Mackintosh Hall facilities the best of luck in finding alternative venues which caters for their specific needs whilst works are being undertaken.

1290 I have been unable to obtain answers through Questions in this House as to the progress of the National Theatre project because the official answer was that it is a private project run by trustees. To the ordinary citizen this answer does not really offer any clarity as to what the future holds. Are funding needs being met? That is a question still asked by many and we deserve an update in this respect.

1295 Madam Speaker, moving now on to educational matters, I wish to start by citing once again, like last year, from a passage I have used. It says:

Children must be able to play, study and grow in a peaceful environment. Woe to anyone who stifles their joyful impulse to hope!

1300 With this in mind, I cannot stress enough the need to ensure we get it absolutely right when planning and building facilities which will serve our children's educational purposes in preparation for adult life. Much has been said in respect of Government's recently completed projects for the re-provision and expansion of our schools.

1305 For our pupils' benefit I sincerely hope that decisions to be taken in respect of future projects, like the Gibraltar College of Further Education, will be based above all upon feedback received from the professionals in the field, namely from teachers themselves. The Gibraltar Teachers' Association feel, unfortunately, that on occasions they are ignored or not consulted on a number of educational reforms that the Department of Education have or are about to embark upon.

As both a past teacher and even past President of the Gibraltar Teachers' Association/NASUWT, I am still someone who has educational matters extremely close to his heart. I repeat my recommendation to the Minister for Education to listen and continue to work as closely as possible with classroom teachers, albeit alongside his senior management teams.

1310 Classroom teachers want to be a part of any process that strives to improve our educational system and they want to be actively involved in meaningful consultation, especially before final

decisions are taken. Surely the way forward, based upon ideas proposed or suggested by these professionals, can only but contribute to the well-being and best possible future for our children.

This, Madam Speaker, is something which I hope we can all agree is paramount.

1315 I would like to take this opportunity to also recommend to the Minister that in the plans for resourcing of our schools careful consideration is given to current trends in respect of developments in schools' curriculums. We have seen the delivery of additional BTEC vocational courses being made available, but some of these classes are being delivered in premises outside of our secondary schools and by staff not directly employed as qualified teachers by the Department of Education.

1320 I beg to ask: why is this necessary? Was it not foreseen in the planning of our two secondary schools that in order to expand upon availability of subjects specialist rooms would be required? I know we have qualified teachers employed by the Department of Education who are able and willing to deliver these courses, so why have we contracted out these services?

1325 Those teachers who wish to offer more courses have personally met with the Director of Education to make clear their availability and their desire to offer BTEC vocational courses. But, unfortunately, their offer to date has not been taken up for some unknown reason.

The GSD have raised the concept of modern apprenticeships in the past and we still believe we need to offer more in this field than we currently provide. Those pupils who do not wish to pursue an academic future need to be provided with the opportunity of a modern apprenticeship programme which, if properly structured, has the same standing as higher education. We need to create a gold standard for an apprenticeship programme so that employers have confidence in the system.

1335 The time for investment is now, Madam Speaker, not just in formal academic education heading towards entry into higher education, but also in the co-ordination of training and skills through vocational courses that carry international accreditation. May I recommend to Government that in their planning for a new College of Further Education special attention is given to the teaching and development of technical and digital skills?

1340 We must not forget the ultimate aim of providing education for our future generations. It is our duty to ensure all pupils always achieve their maximum potential. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

The school-leaving age in the United Kingdom, upon which we also base our educational models, is set at 16; but in the UK it is 16 if students then embark upon an apprenticeship or training type of employment. Will Gibraltar be able to provide skilled workers in traditional trades in the future if and when demands arise?

1345 Our post-Brexit future is still not settled. We know that in the UK pupils can remain in school at least until attaining the age of 18. We have in this past year reviewed our local school-leaving age. I am glad in a manner that the Minister for Education discussed the Bill with me before its final presentation in Parliament, and although there was a slight disagreement at least we could agree that the school-leaving age should be set at 16.

1350 However, a pupil in Gibraltar still does not enjoy the automatic right to embark upon an approved training programme until the age of 18, unlike their counterparts in the UK. Therefore, we do not have equal opportunities offering to the less academic achievers as that offered to their peers who end up qualifying for mandatory scholarships.

1355 Madam Speaker, our post-Brexit future is still not settled. At present we depend heavily upon imported labour in respect of certain trades, so I must ask: why can we not be self-sufficient in this field by offering adequate skills training leading to accredited qualifications?

I very joyfully noted down what Minister Santos offered today. He started to give us the first set of figures of intakes of apprenticeships. It is something close to my heart. I do not know if that Minister is aware or not, but I will be like a pebble in his sandals. I will be a pain in the neck to him.

1360 Over 20 years ago, as an ordinary civil servant I was given a responsibility to handle what at the time we enjoyed, European Social Fund funding. One of the projects that I had to administer was actually vocational training and the training of skills and so on.

1365 So I am well-acquainted through that experience and that of being a teacher of the different levels needed to be crossed in the different stages and well acquainted with the facilities that over 20 years on might need improving, which is why I am trying to encourage you to absorb this under the new college of education and skills and digital skills and so on.

I can be your best ally or I can be your biggest nightmare. So, Minister Santos, I look forward to exchanging ideas with you.

1370 Madam Speaker, whilst desiring only the very best in respect of whatever educational reforms may be required over the next few years, I cannot end without reinforcing that the views of the professionals in this field must be heard and acted upon.

1375 There is no better formula for success than to cultivate a sense of ownership amongst all professionals tasked with the education of our children. Furthermore, the GSD believes that schoolteachers are a priority that is both needed and from which society will receive huge benefits. The job that they do, benefits everyone. Teachers are a key contributory factor towards the success of our future adults and their aspirations in the adult world.

I reinforce: to all those teachers who go the extra mile, I thank you on behalf of all parents for assisting and thus enabling our youngsters to attain even greater successes than past generations have done.

1380 At present there are great and serious concerns unfortunately expressed by teachers around poor behaviour management at secondary schools. Concerns have also been expressed by parents and these, unfortunately again, seem to be growing. Therefore, I sincerely hope that the Senior Education Team, together with our Minister, will be able to work jointly and adequate resources be provided so that we can jointly tackle any behavioural issues in our schools as soon as possible and in a satisfactory manner.

1385 Through Questions I have recently asked in respect of if Government had issued guidance and/or policy directions to school staff on transgender/diverse issues. The Minister replied saying that this was being worked upon, so I was surprised that my friend the Hon. Minister made no reference to this matter during his contribution in this debate.

1390 Perhaps the Minister for Equality, now that he sits here in this House, might wish to have a session and together we can come to some successful guidelines to our teaching staff.

1395 Madam Speaker, no one has been more critical of Government spending than the GSD have over the last few years. We have advocated prudence and pointed to the dangers of uncontrolled spending and we continue to do so. This does not, however, amount to austerity. It is about prioritising Government spending in areas where it is needed or where, as a society, we are going to get the greatest benefit, and I firmly believe education is one of those areas.

1400 Lastly, Madam Speaker, in respect of employment matters, I have asked in this House for updates in respect of Employment Tribunal matters, and I ask as often as the rules have allowed me to. It is sad and unfair to see that there are still some cases awaiting conclusions, some even waiting for a commencement date, in respect of employment disputes. Those who have grievances require final outcomes and I urge the Minister with responsibility for employment matters to take a personal interest and expedite the Employment Tribunal processes. Statistics show some claims have been waiting for years to be heard and this is unacceptable and I daresay could even be a breach of human rights.

1405 Madam Speaker, before I finally sit down, I must take this opportunity to thank you and all your staff at Parliament for the patient and professional way you have all, both collectively and individually, dealt with us Members. I know that you always try to remain calm and patient when dealing with Members on both sides of the House and I thank you sincerely for putting up with us 17 Members, each with their own personal and particular ways of being. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

1410 Madam Speaker, may you and your staff all enjoy a well-deserved summer recess and may the refurbishment of this building end up providing us all with better seats and better, eagerly awaited, adequate and updated facilities.

Who knows, Madam Speaker, maybe during the long summer days when we might venture to take the younger members of our family to enjoy facilities at our play parks we may even perhaps

1415 enjoy a bit of shade if the Government does decide to embark upon my recent recommendations to provide much-needed shaded areas for the benefit both of our children and for us elderly family members who look after them whilst they are safely enjoying playing, as children are rightly entitled to. *(Banging on desks)*

1420 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, after that what started like a rousing speech from the Hon. Mr Reyes, can I suggest that the House should now take a comfort and tea break to quarter to six?

Madam Speaker: All right. We will recess until quarter to six.

The House recessed at 5.18 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.45 p.m.

**The Appropriation Act 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate continued**

1425 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I will be replying to each of the contributions which have been made by the Members opposite on behalf of the Opposition. But before I do so, I wish to raise an issue. It is not a point of order but an issue of comment which I think was made by my friend Mrs Ladislaus in relation to the way that we are treated in this House, where there is absolutely no etiquette or courtesy as far as the timings of the speeches are concerned.

1430 So that people understand, Members of the Opposition – and I would hasten to add I am sure it applies to Members of the Government and indeed members of the staff and yourself – have absolutely no idea as to the timings of the speeches. That is a serious point because it really has an impact not just on those of us who have other professional commitments but also family commitments as well. It is absolutely unacceptable, and bizarre that there are about 17 to 20 people, other people beholden to the Hon. the Leader of the House, which happens to be the Chief Minister's diary.

1435 That is something which does not necessarily need to change as a result of any substantive changes to the Rules, but can simply be addressed if the hon. Member showed us more courtesy and more etiquette in that regard. No doubt, the hon. Member will respond to that particular point in his reply when it comes, and we still do not know when that reply is going to come.

1440 We hear a rumour mill which suggests that it is going to be tomorrow morning, *but it may not be*. So if one has appointments and all the rest of it, one has had to cancel them in the expectation when I finish, and I am the last speaker today, it is expected that the hon. Member will rise and adjourn to whenever he wishes, subject to his commitments and subject to his diary. *(Interjection)*

1445 Madam Speaker – no, the hon. Member says from a seated position, if he asks me, it should come from him and he should be advising all Members of the House and extending the courtesy to staff members as well. But the reality is that the Leader of the Opposition has been asking him about timings and dates and all the rest of it and he has not responded. He is a busy man, but this is a common and basic – *(Interjection)*

1450 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Point of Order, Madam Speaker.

I was asked yesterday at 18.56 by the Leader of the Opposition when I would be taking the reply, whether it would be Friday or next week. I replied at 21.02 and I said Friday. He thanked me for that, Madam Speaker.

1460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, that is true. He will also reflect from his messages that I asked him a couple of times when the Budget would be and I did not get any reply. He knows that.

1465 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, that is absolutely correct. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition sent me a message which I missed. He then sent me another message when I was not yet able to confirm to Government colleagues and we discussed in Cabinet two alternative dates, which depended on Government travel, (*Interjection*) not my travel, other Government Ministers' travel, to be able to determine the date. When we finally determined the date, I had not seen his message but I confirmed in the House on the day that we actually determined in the Cabinet when we would be taking the Budget, the day that we would be taking the Budget.

1470 The hon. Gentleman's point a moment ago was about the reply, and I had informed the Leader of the Opposition – and I assumed that when I informed the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition informs his team – when the reply was going to be.

1475 So I would ask the Hon. Mr Bossino not in relation to the rest of what he said, because of course I will deal with that in my reply, but in relation to my reply that he accept that the point he has made, given the information he now has, if he did not have it before, is actually incorrect.

Hon. D J Bossino: I do not recognise a point of order, Madam Speaker. The hon. Member – no!

1480 **Madam Speaker:** We have aired the situation. Now perhaps you can move on to your next point?

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful.

1485 What I would say by way of comment, by way of general comment which applies to pretty much all of the Members opposite, is that we have had a rather muted couple of days. I do not know what is wrong with them.

1490 Where is the political fire in their respective bellies? Are they really such a spent force of a Government that they cannot bring themselves to make fiery, robust political speeches, which we are used to from Members opposite? What is wrong with them? What is wrong with them? It has been almost bordering on the boring. I have been in this House, my only experience of this House is being in Opposition to the hon. Members' Governments since 2011, barring one stint when I did not stand for election. I am shocked. I am surprised. As I say, it is almost boring.

1495 It may be that what they have had is a reflection not just that they are a heavily weakened Government which has, as the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano said, only a one-person majority, but they have also had a very bad week. They have had a very bad start of this Budget session when we debate the Appropriation Bill. It is clearly an indication, if there ever was one, that we are witnessing the twilight months of this Administration.

1500 What I will seek to show, Madam Speaker, is how weak they are and how weak the Hon. the Chief Minister is, how dysfunctional they are, how contradictory they have been in their statements, and therefore how divided the current Administration is. All the attributes of a dying Government.

1505 Because we are seeing and witnessing before us a lame duck Chief Minister, a lame-duck Leader of this Government. That is what we are experiencing on the opposite side, a lame-duck Minister for Finance who manages all on his own to introduce probably the most ill-thought-out revenue-raising measure – and funnily for him because he is not used to doing that, it was a deeply unpopular measure, which was of course the pollution levy, which was subjected to a record-breaking U-turn. Within literally hours the hon. Member came to this House and U-turned on the policy he had announced in the morning. He did it straight after lunch.

As a result of political expediency, he shunted and put to one side all his environmentalist credentials and for political expediency backed down, just like they did in relation to the

1510 pedestrianisation of Line Wall Road and also the removal two years ago, and it has been referred to by my colleagues, of the company levy.

1515 Even the manner of the retraction was odd and strange. Because when he first announced it, there was absolutely no mention of any exceptions, that it would not apply to elderly citizens and all the rest of. That he said at the moment of the U-turn, *ex post facto*, when he realised that there was a problem. Then we expected that the Minister for Transport would have something to say about it – but I will deal with that in a moment.

1520 Are we to believe and accept that he is really so out of touch, that power over the last 12 years has gone to his head so much that he cannot see the reality out there, that this impact would have a very serious effect, particularly on the lower income bracket, those individuals in our society who have low incomes? Is he also that out of touch that he had the gall to say in his GBC interview, I think before we came back to the House, that he bought a Porsche to cheer himself up?

1525 I could not believe my eyes or ears when I saw and heard what he had said, but it may make sense because in evidence to the inquiry, to the now infamous inquiry, the McGrail Inquiry, he says that he is wealthier than he ever wanted to be as a lawyer and as a Chief Minister. That is what he said. In fact, he may be able to elucidate this House because as far as I know I thought that importation of 10-year-plus old cars was not in compliance with the law, but he may be able to elucidate in his reply.

His car crash tax, CCT for short, is akin to Thatcher’s poll tax and Theresa May’s dementia tax, and we all know where those two lady Tory MPs ended up. They both had to resign whilst in office.

1530 I am not seeking or asking for the hon. Member’s immediate resignation, but maybe it is something he could consider. His CCT was so flawed, technically and politically but particularly politically – and this is what surprises me of the hon. Gentleman, who I know and have known for a very long time – and I attribute to him a gift in terms of political manoeuvring and getting to the place that he wants to be by hook or by crook. That he does have.

1535 He is a tactician by nature and by approach and that – he may see it as an attribute, some people would see it as a criticism – he goes for it and he gets it and he has had an ambition to be Chief Minister since being at school and he pursued it and he has made it. Very well.

1540 But I find it surprising that he should make such an error to the extent that I am told that actually it is all part of a deflection tactic. That he has not made an innocent error. That it is a deflection, to deflect the people’s attention from the unpopular measures that he has had to introduce: like the increase to 15% tax and also the increase in social insurance. Two measures which have already received the criticism and opprobrium from the Chamber of Commerce very quickly and the Catering Association.

1545 But I suggest another possibility. Are there dark forces at play, Mr Feetham? Are there dark forces at play? (*Interjection*) Is it the Bossano/Feetham leadership campaign which are up to their tactics in order to malign the current leader of their party? Is it that?

1550 Or have they been prompted into action as a result of the indication as a result of the indication from the Hon. Chief Minister that actually he is not going to be going that quickly after all. By our own calculations the hon. Gentleman is going to be there at least until April 2027, months before the general election needs to be called. Is that why the wolves within his party are already making more strident and confident moves?

Is that it? (*Interjection*) Because the hon. Members, no one believes the Hon. Minister for Health, the putative leader of the party, when she says that there are no *Hunger Games*, and accuses us of *Game of Thrones*. I mean, come on.

1555 It is very palpable, it is very obvious. She kept on emphasising during the course of her contribution the word ‘together’. ‘We are all together’. Looking around to the left, to the right, ‘We are together’. All that showed from this perspective is a massive guilty conscience. It was a defensive mechanism. It was very obvious. This is so much fun actually seeing it being played out on the other side.

1560 Because the political reality, Madam Speaker, is that the hon. Gentleman has lost his political mojo. That is correct.

1565 It happens. It is normal. He is at the end of his political career, certainly as leader. Look, he may carry on in another capacity but certainly as leader of this community he is coming to the end. He told people publicly during the course of the election campaign. But he is now like Tony Blair after the WMD controversy where anything that gentleman said nobody believed him. Nobody believed him. This is why the hon. Gentleman has lost his political mojo.

This is now not just about the car tax. My hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I attended with Mrs Sanchez. The people who were out there were not just talking about the car tax. They are fed up with him and his Government. They are fed up with them. They are deeply unpopular.

1570 What the car tax did was it broke the camel's back, and what we saw and witnessed – last Monday, I think it was, it feels so long ago now – was pent-up frustration. That is what it was. People were talking about issues of housing, employment, all the rest of it. Because they wanted them out. In fact, asking us how it would be possible to kick them out. This is what they were fed up and concerned about.

1575 Let me quote to him what another resigning Prime Minister said, a Prime Minister who also had to resign from office, Mr Boris Johnson, when he said – talking about his colleagues on the back benches, but in this case it applies to the people of Gibraltar:

... the herd instinct is powerful and when the herd moves, it moves.

And there is nothing you can do about it.

1580 Look, Madam Speaker, we all know what the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite had been up to during the course of their contributions. We all know it. He in particular – again, I do not know what is wrong with him – uncharacteristically for him gave a rather short speech and actually it was quite anodyne as well.

1585 But my theory is this, and let's see if I am proven right: it was simply to justify his soon-to-be – whenever it happens, tomorrow, next week, next Monday, we will get to it – his vicious attacks on us which we predict he will deploy with full vigour and fervour tomorrow morning. The hon. Gentleman opposite is the one – certainly in my experience in this House, since 2011 – who has raised the bar of viciousness, corrosion and toxicity to a level that we are only learning to match.

Because as an Opposition we have to fight fire with fire. There is no other way of doing it. Yet, he complains when I say that we are here to attack. I mean, come on.

1590 Now, all of a sudden, they have all developed this very thin skin it seems. But we are responding to their attacks, that is what we are doing, and we do so with fervour and passion and conviction but with respect, and with respect always. And what we have been doing since 2011 ...

1595 I mean, for goodness sakes, anybody who is old enough or who has followed Gibraltar politics over the last 30 or 40 years will know that this has got nothing to do with the way that they conducted opposition. Indeed, the way that Sir Joe Bossano conducted opposition from when he formed the party opposite in 1976, all the way through to 1988, and then again when he was booted out of office from 1996 to 2011.

1600 When he used the union and there were strikes galore everybody knew what was happening. It was a *vicious* opposition against Sir Joshua Hassan until he was toppled. It took him 16 years. Then the same with Sir Peter Caruana and the GSD, and how he utilised the dockyard to create an industrial strike.

They are pretending now to be cute little bambis. Come on, nobody believes that.

1605 I could not believe my ears when I heard the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano – with the greatest of respect to him – to say that they do not question when we have failed to deliver in Government our electoral promises. That was jaw-dropping stuff, as were other things he said which were equally jaw-dropping.

We are not going to take lessons – again with the greatest of respect to my friend, the Deputy Chief Minister – who went as far as to suggest that we were undermining the democratic process. I do not know where he gets that from.

1610 I know that they are trying to paint a picture that somehow we are election-result deniers. How are we undermining the democratic process? We accept it. We are here, by a very small margin and with a composition of the House which, since the new Constitution was introduced, is the first time that we have a 9:8 distribution of seats. *Very small margin.*

1615 But we have no argument with the result, let me make that absolutely clear. What we have is an argument with the way they won the election. That is where we have an argument with them in relation to that, because the result – and this is something that we could have done – was so close, and had it been closer we could have legitimately sought a recount, but we did not. We accepted it, despite the narrowness of the absolute votes difference between the Members opposite and us. They had that look, and that would have been a legitimate course of action to have embarked upon but we did not. So we respect the result.

1620 What we complain about is that the electorate did *not* come to an informed decision because they did not present a true picture, and I will go into that shortly. They did not present a true picture because goodness knows how different the result may have been had they done so.

1625 Then, once again, the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano talks about him complaining again, with the newfound thin skin of the hon. Gentleman who has been now in this House since 1972 – when he and I were born, so 52 years – when he complained that he was being targeted personally by us.

We do not recognise that. We do not recognise that we did that.

1630 He says, and I quote him: 'I have learnt something about the sort of people' ... Now, that is respectful, 'the sort of people ... who are now representing the GSD in this House'. He has always done that.

In 1992 when he won that whopping still-to-be-beaten victory at 72% or 73% of the vote, he said exactly the same thing in a super-patronising – no scolding Peter, as he then was – Caruana and the GSD team. But he also did it to the AACR, as I have said before to Mr Canepa, to Mr Hassan and to Mr Caruana. And what about the vicious attacks that we have been subjected to?

1635 Let's set the record straight. What about the vicious attacks that we have *personally* been subjected to? Some of us? Mrs Sanchez was subjected to personal attacks during the campaign.

I am not necessarily going to, because I cannot recall, attribute that to their official accounts.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: It was.

1640 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And it was, I am told by the Leader of the Opposition. An official account attacks Mrs Sanchez personally. Certainly the one which was an official account was a personal attack on the Leader of the Opposition, based on an untruth, because you can attack on something which is based on truth, which is that if you vote for Azopardi you get Andorra. It is not true!

1645 He never said that and he proved that to be the case because he managed to find the video of the debate so it was beyond all reasonable doubt! The prosecution would not have succeeded. The man was and is innocent of that charge. That is a personal attack, but it is very disappointing, but we have to accept it, I suppose that is the nature of politics. I hope it does not get any worse than that because it will be a sad place.

1650 Then the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano talks about the incredible attempt to overturn the Sovereign Right of Parliament to determine policy by a majority vote of one. Where does he get that from? We accept that they have a majority in this House. He mentioned that in the context of the passing of the Inquiries Bill, and that we went to see the Governor in relation to that.

1655 But again, he says these things based on complete and utter fiction, as indeed the Hon. Chief Minister did the same. He accused us of entertaining direct rule. I mean, what? Nonsense, based once again on an untrue and inaccurate premise. Where does he get that from?

As we said in our statement, and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in our statement at the time produced the relevant excerpt of his letter, the email I think it was, to the then Governor, and I quote where he says:

As my request made clear, what we ask is to formally record our views to you ...

1660 – in other words, the Governor –

... on this important matter, I have not suggested in any communication that I am going to seek to persuade you on whether to assent to this Bill ...

– which is what the hon. Members opposite were suggesting we had done –

... I am very conscious ...

– the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition says:

... of the boundaries here and I have no intention of crossing lines that I view should not be crossed. That judgement is a matter for you ...

– i.e. the Governor –

... within the constitutional provisions and I intend to make no submissions or requests in that regard.

1665 It is very clear what the truth is. If anybody is sensitive about the roles and responsibilities and the boundary lines in this House, it is the Hon. Leader of the Opposition (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) who is an expert, legally, in relation to these matters and has written about this extensively.

So let's get these things right and let's not play reverse psychology games with us because actually it certainly does not persuade us, it is not going to make us nervous in any way because we know we are supported by the truth and veracity.

1670 Then the Chief Minister says, 'We put Gibraltar first every time'. This is in criticism of us. What on earth does he think we do on this side of the House and when we see people outside Gibraltar, and we are here to represent 50% of the Gibraltarian electorate? This is what we do every time and he needs to understand that.

1675 What we seek to do is to remove him and his colleagues from office as soon as possible; because we think that is necessary; because we think that is good for Gibraltar; because we think it is absolutely necessary that their term in office ends as soon as possible. But of course democratically speaking and under the relevant legal and constitutional rules, so at this stage unless the hon. Gentleman calls a snap and early election, we have to wait another three and a half years or however many months, that he referred to I think in one of the answers to the
1680 questions.

But the reality is that the Hon. Mr Picardo does not like – and this is why he is in such an uppity and bad mood it seems these days – he does not like to be reminded of his weakness. Because we know – and those who know us and know him personally – that his ego suffered a huge blow on 12th October, the date of the election. Not only was he only able to scrape through in terms of his
1685 team by a small number of votes we, in effect, have I think probably the weakest Government in Gibraltar's recent political history. Because he was, in an unprecedented way, unable to secure a seat for his colleague, Mr Daryanani.

The reality is that we are – and I did not realise until the Hon. Leader of the Opposition mentioned it at the inaugural session of the House – the biggest party in this Chamber at the
1690 moment because they are split. They are not split in political colour terms, they are split in other ways and I will go into that now.

But they are split in terms of their political origin, that they are two different parties. Some would argue that they are really one and the same and they have been since they joined together in the year 2000. But we are the biggest party.

1695 Dwelling for a moment on Mr Daryanani, whom he now praises and attributes the larger and more attractive numbers that we are seeing within the tourist sector. He talks about the receipts and he says that these are all due to the efforts of Mr Daryanani. The reality is, without taking away from the shine, that what we are doing here – let's be honest and objective – is playing

1700 catch-up from the bad COVID days and that is why we are, thank goodness, beyond that and seeing an increase.

But he says – I do not think he mentioned me personally but I know he was referring to me when he says that he was much maligned by me – that he was attacked unfairly and unjustifiably by me. But if that is the case, how then does he explain that the hon. Gentleman is not here with us today? That he does not have a seat?

1705 He should respect the democratic judgement and verdict which was passed by the people of Gibraltar. They must have agreed with me and what we were saying about his discharge of his duties and *not with him*. Then he says that whenever one of his own are attacked he will be there. He will be there to defend them. Where was his defence?

1710 If there was a defence it clearly was not very successful because they are down by one and the Liberal Party has lost one Member of its team. The reality is – and everybody knows this, and the Leader of the Opposition made a reference to it during the course of his intervention – they were scrounging around for votes during the course of the election campaign.

1715 Days before, letters were flying around the place and we could not believe our eyes when we saw these letters. Every possible interest group, every possible group that had a desire for things from the Government, they were granted it. But that is true to form. That is how the hon. Members won the 2011 election. We nearly won our fifth term.

But they did the same and they only won that election by a whisker, much more than they won the last one. These are promises which we know the hon. Gentleman will not be delivering.

1720 This is a lame-duck Chief Minister, as I have said, who only weakened his position further – and this is why he is a lame duck – by indicating that he will be relinquishing his position during the course of this term.

1725 Alastair Campbell in a podcast – which I know he is fond of, and I am fond of too, although I have not had much time to listen to it recently, *'The Rest is Politics'* – made a reference, and this was in the context of the Modi third election win in India. I think at the time they were still counting votes so he was not sure but the strong indications were that he had won, but that he had won by not the landslide that was expected, he had only just won.

I quote Alistair Campbell, because I thought it was of interest, when he says:

Political authority is one of those things that you cannot always measure. Even if you win ...

– as Modi says he has, this is Alastair Campbell, he is going to be the Prime Minister for a third term –

... political authority is an intangible but unbelievably important currency.

1730 He has lost that currency. He knows it. The Ministers around him know it because they are all already flying around his political carcass like vultures. And all this business that they are all together and all hunky dory, I am sorry, we are not buying it.

1735 We saw it in full – borrowing your word 'technicolour' from Mr Feetham – on Father's Day when he wished everybody a Happy Father's Day we did not get the connection because there it was a direct challenge to his leader and to the Hon. Chief Minister where basically he was saying he is not going to have any of it. This is not going to be a passing of the baton just because he, the Hon. Chief Minister, wishes to pass it on to the Hon. Minister for Health. He is not going to have it!

1740 He must have sensed – I think it was at the time that it had been announced, or the hon. Lady had gone already – that she was being subjected to favouritism. He was not going to have it, because he challenged it by saying that if the Members so wish it – although he claims not to have any political ambition – he will offer himself to be leader of the GSLP. Good for him. But that was an immediate, clear challenge of the Hon. the Chief Minister's authority.

1745 As I say, I think his feathers must have been ruffled by the obvious favouritism, that preferred treatment that the Hon. Minister for Health, Mrs Vasquez, was receiving. This declaration of war

we suspect has the support of Sir Joe Bossano. That is the Bossano true socialist – and a bit more about that later – camp of the party. Clearly also the support of the Hon. the Minister for Housing who made a complimentary comment to that post.

1750 But what one can say about the Hon. Mr Nigel Feetham, the Minister for Tax, Financial Services and all the rest of it, is that he is certainly leaving no stone unturned in pursuance of his leadership bid. Our *Twitter* feeds have been alight since 12th October. There is not a meeting with an interest group, a financial services provider, that he does not attend and does not then show the wider public, whether on Instagram, on Twitter, on Facebook, on the *Chronicle*.

1755 With tie, without tie, with his jumper. His jumper has overstayed its welcome. His jumper is always on his shoulders. That was Mr Feetham's style. The hyperactive Mr Feetham which we have seen everywhere. It is now clear that it is in pursuance of his leadership bid, despite his earlier protestations that he was not interested.

1760 But let me give the hon. Gentleman a word of warning (*Interjection*) because I do not think at this stage it has been said about the Hon. Mr Feetham. [*Interjection*] What the hon. Members say from a sedentary position we are not to ignore, unless it is being contrary to the rules.

But he needs to be warned that he is not going to go unscathed and that we are not going to be reminding him and the general public of his relatively recent political history and activity. Because the hon. Gentleman was a very active Member of *this* party, of the GSD.

1765 I do not think the others can say it, not even the Leader of the Opposition, he and I shared an executive table together – yes! – for a number of years. (*Interjection*) But he was an equally active Member of this party in support of the then leadership to topple the Hon. the Chief Minister and to topple this Government, which is what we continued to seek to do. But he was trying to do the same, not on this side of the House but certainly being a full and active Member of the Gibraltar Social Democrats.

1770

Hon. E J Reyes: I remember.

Hon. D J Bossino: Sorry, Mr Reyes also remembers, of course.

1775 But let me move the historical dial a bit further back and let me remind Members that the Hon. Mr Feetham also left and resigned in a rather dramatic way the GSLP, the party to which in effect he was born into.

That was really the GSLP, for the Feethams were very much a part of the DNA of the GSLP and the GSLP was part of the DNA of the Feethams. Mr Picardo came later.

1780 But the reality is they had no compunction to then separate, legitimately so, and formed the Labour Party. That is the hon. Member's political history which we will remind people should he make a move. Well he has already made a move, is my argument, and no doubt he will defend that position.

1785 But let me warn him about something else. Let me warn him about the Chief Minister, because he had no compunction in reminding us – and I think it may have been a slip of the tongue – when he talked about the supposed dirty deeds of the *other* Mr Feetham when he talked about, I think he said, 'A spree of job creation in advance of the 2011 General Election', 8th December 2011, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we will not forget that. (*Interjection*)

1790 But does the Chief Minister not recall that the Minister – Mr Feetham, the Minister now – was a member of our party at the time so, therefore, arguably complicit in the actions of the other Mr Feetham. So he has got to be careful about what he says and remind himself of certain historical political, basic facts like that. (*Interjection*) Fair enough.

1795 With the hon. Lady, all I can say is I am not sure what is happening there. She is clearly the Hon. Chief Minister's protégé, as I have said, and she has been for many years. He has said so expressly and we all know that to be the case, even from her student days, if I am not mistaken.

She is the chosen one. By any stretch of the imagination she is the chosen one, although there was a bit of a blip when the Hon. Mr Feetham then declared his intention to stand for leadership, then Mr Picardo I think was less than confident in terms of his support of the Minister for Health.

1800 But she must have thought that the much-coveted role – i.e. being Chief Minister – for her, was going to be handed over to her on a plate. But the reality is she has been burdened with one of the most heavy Departments.

The hon. Lady spent what was two and a half hours – because she said and she warned us that her speech in the contribution was going to be long – because she has so many things to cover, and Health is a heavy one. Of course the problem there for her is that she will not be able to get her head above the parapet dealing with the administrative side of running a Department.

1805 The political things, the Hon. Mr Feetham already has a head start. I do not know whether he has more time or the nature of his Departments are less strenuous in terms of the hours that he has spent, he is able to do the politics.

1810 The hon. Lady, the only thing that I have been able to identify that she has been able to do – because that was certainly handed over to her on a plate – the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was meant to go, he was not able to go, the Hon. the Chief Minister for some reason did not go, we do not know why; and then she was able to attend the United Nations in New York. That was a *huge* opportunity for her.

1815 But other than that, I think she has to be careful and take advice from me that she needs to do other things and do a bit more of the politics, (*Interjection*) because the hon. Lady was unable to show that she has politics running in her blood, that she really feels it.

When she last presented the motion in this House she completely sidestepped what I had to say – that is fine, I do not take it personally – on the basis that I had dealt with the politics of it. What is it that we are doing here? This is politics. This is a political Chamber.

1820 She had the opportunity to show the strength of character that she has as a firebrand Member of the Socialist Party that she is going to lead. She missed that opportunity and put it to one side and bypassed my comments. So she needs to improve her campaigning skills.

I cannot leave this topic without mentioning where is the hon. Professor in all of this? I am not suggesting that because he is not here, I do not want to make that comment.

1825 I am taking this context: I am told I think on good authority that he is sulking somewhere in a corner. He does not like any of this. I am not saying now, because I am told that he is actually not enjoying it any more. The first thing that happened was that he was divested of his responsibilities for Culture, which was very close to his heart and is now being run by Mr Santos.

1830 He is then given Transport, which I am told he dislikes immensely. Then, to boot, he is saying all these manoeuvres. Because the chance of aspiring for greater things – and the Chief Minister was not here during his speech, but I will go into it now – his opportunity is fast passing him by.

This must be very sad for the hon. Gentleman who is very fond of his Llanito and he is pursuing that. The hon. Gentleman does not have a grandmother, because he is always talking about himself and his ego and the ‘me’ and the ‘I’ and ‘I do this’, and ‘I have been appointed this’. So this must hurt him a lot. Another one with a very thin skin.

1835 Then he expects us to believe that, ‘I am not really a politician’, credentials are still there. Nobody believes that any more, because he said – and I will enlighten the Hon. the Chief Minister who was not here when his colleague gave his contribution, so he can continue with his diary commitments but we cannot – is that he said, and I quote, ‘*El Jardinero* is capable of more’.

1840 He actually said that he intends to be here for life, forgetting the democratic processes which need to happen at least, maximum, every four years. He is going to be here for life, like a tinpot dictator, or like Sir Joe Bossano, and he expects us to believe that he is not really a politician.

I think that was a subliminal declaration of war as well, that the Hon. Mr Cortes also has his eye in the leadership, and I am told that he does. The hon. Gentleman opposite may not know this but I am told that he does.

1845 But I need to tell him that he does not have much support on the other side. Because I can tell him for free, the fact is that neither the current leader of the GSLP, his party, or the former immediate predecessor of the current leader, Sir Joe Bossano, were here to hear him. I tell him for free that that was as snub.

1850 That was a direct snub to the hon. Gentleman. Sir Joe Bossano has only been here to listen to a part of the hon. mover of this Bill's speech, but then has given his contribution and then not come back. We have not seen him since; he has disappeared.

And I do not like saying that because people have their own obligations and all the rest of it, but he kept on saying it about me four or five years ago, and I thought that was very unfair so I am treating him in the same manner.

1855 I do not know. Maybe Mr Cortes will be content to be there in effect for a Minister with his relations with Morocco. But he was very quick to disassociate himself from a measure which I would have thought the hon. Gentleman would have introduced, which is the CCT. He was very quick to disassociate himself by saying, much more stridently than the Chief Minister – because the Chief Minister qualified it, 'I had said this' or 'This was our intention' – it is not going to happen.
1860 He said 'No way'. That is what the hon. Gentleman said.

He scurries off into *'el cuarto de la salud'* and slams the door on the face of the Chief Minister. 'Nothing to do with me, Guv' – this is the Minister for the Environment. And, let me add, the Minister for Transport.

1865 My good friend, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister, in his usual way is putting his head down and he is seeing his own personal success, because he had a personal vote, whilst the Chief Minister did not, he came second in the listings. Pretty much unprecedented, in fact I would add, unprecedented for a sitting Chief Minister to be treated this way and to receive this type of result from the electorate.

1870 He is seeing it evaporating from his eyes because he is not using that in some way to take over the top job. But I suspect it has got to do (*Interjection*) that he knows that the Government is in its twilight years, as I have put to hon. Members, and that the time has come to switch out the lights and go home.

1875 If he were to do that, I wonder, it would be interesting to see what happens with the alliance, because the alliance is only being kept together, as far as I can see, because of the deep relationship that there is with the current main officeholders of the parties opposite. If one or the other goes I query whether the alliance will continue, because there have been rumblings now for many years and I think they became even more intense and acute before the last election when people on the GSLP side were getting rather annoyed with who were potential candidates, that three of the slots were being occupied by the Liberals.

1880 That relationship has now outspent and overstayed its welcome. The only thing that is keeping it together is the obvious glue that there is between the hon. Gentleman opposite. But the question is: what would happen should that dynamic end when one or both of them leave those positions?

1885 What I would ask the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister to do is to pre-empt that and come over to our side. I make that offer for free, *gratis*, he can come over and we can enter at least into negotiations. He is more than entitled.

1890 He has entered into that arrangement with the hon. Gentleman opposite, he has won two seats, unfortunately he did not win the third – when the Liberals have done well – and come with us; and then we can have a motion of no confidence passed and we can call a general election or alternatively we simply become the Government. *That* he is capable and able to do, and I would ask him to consider it. (*Interjection*) Something to consider for him.

1895 But whoever wins – whether it is a 'he' or a 'she' – that leader will also be a lame-duck leader because according to the Hon. the Chief Minister, I think he was suggesting from a sedentary position. He was denying that the chronology was wrong, that he was going to be staying there until April 2027 according to their internal constitutional arrangements in the GSLP. So, when the person takes over, we will very quickly need to start considering what date to set for the next general election.

Then, if one knows one's political history, you end up in a situation like Adolfo Canepa did when Sir Joshua Hassan left in autumn 1987 and the man had to call the election for 24th March 1988,

1900 and he lost it. Because whoever takes over will have to defend at that stage, 14-16 years of Government. It is very difficult to do. And they are deeply unpopular, as I have argued.

1905 It is very obvious and evident by the election results. So, today our compatriots in the United Kingdom are voting and it has been very difficult for Mr Sunak because he has had to defend 14 years of Conservative rule. That is what is going to befall the successor. So that is where we are.

As I have said, the Government is divided and we have the Bossano camp on one side and the Picardo camp on the other and the cracks are only deepening before our very eyes.

1910 And in a further challenge – and this is *very* important because it goes to the core of what the hon. Gentlemen and Women have been doing since Brexit – we have had the letter from Sir Joe Bossano on 10th June, which was published in the *Chronicle*, and if that was not a throwing of the gauntlet, I do not know what is.

1915 When he came out from hiding, in reaction to a piece written by the editor of the *Chronicle*, when he was talking, I think what Sir Joe was sensing was some justification by Mr Reyes about the need for Spanish boots on the ground, so to speak, if I can use it, for Spanish officials in our Port and Airport.

Just before I carry on, I heard over the weekend that Sir Joe is also going to be a contender for the leadership of the party. I had it on good authority. Let's see if it happens. Yes, we are selling the popcorn at GSD HQ. (*Interjection*)

1920 The Chief Minister wishes us to believe that his position is totally aligned with that of Sir Joe Bossano, but that of course is to ignore the politics of the statements and the messaging that we are seeing, because a lot of what Sir Joe Bossano said was fine. It was fine, it was kind of the Government's position, more stridently in favour of a no deal, and I will go into that in a bit more depth now.

1925 But his last statement, and I will quote it, he says, 'If it is a question of who blinks first, as some people have suggested –' (**A Member:** You.) I have not suggested that! He is probably talking about Members opposite, as some people have suggested, 'For the record I' – not we the Cabinet, as the Hon. Chief Minister says – 'I, Joe Bossano, never blink'. That is Joe Bossano through and through.

1930 But the suggestion which is being made there is that he personally is the only possible bulwark to any progression towards a deal which the Hon. the Chief Minister may be prepared or otherwise to countenance. This came through very clearly during the course of the speeches.

1935 On the one hand you had the Chief Minister looking at ways of getting the deal over the line, and that is a respectful position. And in the context of the discharging of the various legal responsibilities under Schengen, he said, 'There are many ways to skin a cat' the hon. Gentleman said. That is the language of diplomacy *par excellence*, if there ever was one.

Totally different. Totally at loggerheads with what Sir Joe was saying.

1940 The difference in approach was also very evident with the Deputy Chief Minister when he quite rightly was warning of the dangers. That was the main focus of his speech about the dangers of a 'no-deal' scenario, saying that this benefits the bridging measures which we enjoy as a result of the unilateral measures taken by Spain – we are not entitled to that – would end should there be no treaty, or certainly there is a big risk of that.

1945 He said in very stark, dramatic terms in terms of the content of what he said – and he is right, that Gibraltar cannot remain as it is today. That is what the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was saying. He says we cannot stay as we are. The language of warning, the language of concern, the language of staring at the abyss, if we do not have a deal. And the Chief Minister, 'There are various ways of skinning a cat'.

1950 But then we had *Braveheart* in Sir Joe Bossano when, in his contribution, where in effect he was proceeding on the premise he has done it before, although on this occasion it was even more strident because if I recall, in the last Appropriation Bill debate that we had, what he said was, 'Fabian Picardo wants an enduring deal'. Joe Bossano says, 'Four years and then we are not going

to accept Spanish officers on the ground so we are not going to have a deal'. Okay? Stark difference.

1955 Here it was worse, in effect he is saying, 'The strategy is a reduction of dependence on the hinterland'. Completely different. That is his strategy. That is what he wants to achieve. The approach is totally different. He talked about a repositioning of the economy but the unpalatable reality that the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister was talking about, that did not form part of his speech.

1960 Can I, therefore, ask the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister to have a quiet word with Sir Joe and make him realise what it is that this community is facing should there be no deal? Can he have that conversation with him, because the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano is in a completely siege mentality state of mind, as is normally the case. (A Member: Baked beans.) Baked beans, indeed.

Then Sir Joe Bossano builds his position on the basis of his National Economic Plan, and he is very proud, he says, that they are the only party who had a plan should there not be a deal since the 2019 manifesto, and he has repeated it.

1965 In essence, and put in the simplest terms as possible, what this basically is, is a reliance on the Savings Bank money, of which there is a nice little gold pot there, for now. That is what it is, because they have raided the cash from the other accounts. We have got a few millions of pounds here. People invest, you give them good interest rates and it is normal, people are going to invest because you have a very attractive rate, and they probably think, 'This is a good investment'. And he is using that money.

1970 And people that are Members here know the different ... It might be the Hon. the Chief Minister is right as far as one thing is concerned: there is very clearly a blue line between them and us on that issue, because it is the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano who takes all the decisions *himself*. It is not even at Cabinet level! It is not even consulted!

1975 We think with the Hon. the Minister for Finance, Sir Joe Bossano is the one who takes all the decisions, and then once he takes the decisions it is permeated through this – I cannot think of a better word, because I am a bit bored – oh, yes, I was going to say 'web' but that is a bit 1990's – it is actually a *jungle* of companies in respect of which Mr Clinton is criticised when he wants details.

1980 This is dangerous stuff. And then he tries to persuade us to support his National Economic Plan. But how can we support his National Economic Plan if we do not know what it is, other than the basics?

1985 How can we reach a value judgement as to whether this is a safe investment? Because at the end of the day this is a complete conflation of kind of hybrid private companies, in respect of which he says, 'The Chief Minister says he cannot answer questions because they are outside the Government's remit'. And a bit more about that later.

1990 But then they are doing public stuff, building houses, building pensioners' homes, building a stadium. I simply do not understand. When we asked last week – it feels again like it was last month – about the close to £200 million that was spent through this company, Sir Joe was not there so therefore he was not able to answer, and I think the Chief Minister built up a brick wall simply because I think deep down he had to defend the position because he does not know what is going.

1995 Then he treated us to a word salad, to the point that we were looking at each other, confused, saying, 'What the hell is the hon. Gentleman saying?' I have some nice quotes about word salads which I think apply. The word salad will look like deflecting the blame and changing the subject. The goal of this tactic is to confuse the hell out of you using long, convoluted sentences that will do just that. That is what the Hon. Chief Minister embarked upon.

2000 I could not believe my ears. We could not believe our ears. He was as clear as mud. He was making no sense. The very clear and undeniable fact – and this is one of the reasons why they cannot obtain our support – is that in effect what we are dealing with here is a parallel Government under the command and authority solely and exclusively of Sir Joe Bossano and nobody else. Nobody else on that side and certainly nobody else on this side. This is a paradigm.

2005 And we, the Opposition – sorry, not we the Opposition, we the people of Gibraltar are not sighted. Decisions are taken politically by Sir Joe Bossano and then executed through Government companies, which completely – despite their protestations – offend basic principles of openness and democratic governance.

Things could have been so different, as I alluded to earlier, because being the democrat that the Hon. the Chief Minister claims he is, he says he is keen to be open and transparent. He is keen to ensure that there is fair play, being the equivalent of a political saint.

2010 Why did he not ensure that the McGrail Inquiry happened before the last general election? Why did he not ensure, as it was his gift to do so, to have had the Principal Auditor's report published *before* the last general election? And we still do not have the complete version, it only goes up to a certain year. We are still waiting for the next one.

2015 Because he has got two options here: why was he not more transparent and honest to the people of Gibraltar as to what the real state of play was as respects the Brexit negotiations, when he said in the hustings and in the campaign that they were at kissing distance to the Spanish press, at 0.01%.

2020 We started to get it wrong when we said 0.1% – 0.01%. Here we are, nine months down the line almost and there is still nothing. Such a pity because we are totally and utterly convinced that if the people of Gibraltar had been aware of the reality there would have been a completely different result and we would have been on that side of the House and they would have been on this side of the House.

What they have been subjecting the electorate to is a hiding and delaying of basic truths, very similar to the NHS Brexit bus slogan, the infamous one now, at the time of the Brexit referendum.

2025 We have already said, Madam Speaker, that we will be reserving our comments on the McGrail Inquiry, save for a few things that we have said here and there.

2030 Something which is totally and utterly different in terms of the behaviour of hon. Gentlemen opposite who have used their newspaper, the *New People*, to give almost a daily account of their one-sided spin as to what has been happening. We have not said anything about it, other than a few comments here and there. But one broad point can be made – and it has indeed been made by the Leader of the Opposition, the spectacle – and one good thing that has happened I think here is that we have had live streaming of these proceedings, people have been watching it.

2035 The spectacle they have been watching nevertheless is a sad indictment of the malaise that pervades our Government, lines blurred, lack of arm's-length dealings, documentary evidence of what should have been official meetings lost or not taken, to name just but a few.

This has to change. But I and we are convinced that the only way that this is going to change is should we be returned to office. That is the only way that this attitude, this approach to governance, is going to be changing.

2040 Because it is very obvious – and there is evidence of that – that the hon. Gentleman has learnt nothing from his experience. He continues in his normal way unabated. His view of life is undiminished when he appointed Peter Montegriffo as the Chairman of the Gibraltar Police Authority. The Opposition was very clear as to what his position was in relation to that.

2045 On the Principal Auditor's report, we have also seen how in certain projects there was a lack of adherence to tender regulations, verification of payments, examination of project documentation, evaluation of planning, project management, alignment of info. The list simply goes on. There was simply a general lack of accountability, governance and transparency.

This is without really being sighted on what Government companies are doing and the contracts that they receive because I understand the Principal Auditor does not have oversight over these things.

2050 Madam Speaker, dealing briefly with Rooke Residential Home. This is another of these much-vaunted projects under the National Economic Plan, which as it stands is costing by way of loans the Saving Bank almost £40 million – £38 million. From the answers that we have received from Sir Joe Bossano it may actually be rising and probably likely to rise. This was much vaunted by the Hon. Sir Joe as a project which is going to be completing in months. It should have completed last

2055 June, and now it is the subject of delay and more expense, yet not a dicky bird was mentioned about it by the Hon. Sir Joe in his contribution. That in itself is very telling indeed.

But on Tuesday afternoon we were subjected to two political bombshells. Yes, there were two, and they both came from the left of the party, from the true socialist side of the party. The one from Sir Joe Bossano who openly admitted – although now today they have issued a press release
2060 responding to the points made about the issue made by Mr Clinton, which I think is a bit odd given that we are still in the throes of this debate.

But the Government has issued a press release probably under the hand of Sir Joe Bossano, criticising the GSD view on this. He said that in effect they have massaged the figures by putting the money that Government-owned companies, instead of above the line, below the line, so then
2065 it looks like a surplus. Ah, because they did it ... You cannot really make this up. We could not believe our ears when he made that admission.

They keep on pursuing it by way of press release and calling us liars and calling Mr Clinton a liar and the Opposition. This is totally and utterly objectionable behaviour by the hon. Gentleman
opposite.

2070 Then the other bombshell came from the Hon. Che Guevara himself. I am referring to a historical figure.

Madam Speaker: We will refer to the hon. Members by name and not by a description, which you would prefer, because it will keep matters much more proper.

2075

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Feetham – who I described as the Hon Che Guevara for the reasons that I have just stated – said that he is clearly, and we are seeing evidence of it in advance of the Budget, on a mission to raise tax. He said so clearly, that is his philosophy and he referred to individuals in his address.

2080 But he let one cat out of the bag when from a sedentary position, Mr Clinton suggested, ‘Well, why don’t you impose high taxes on big earners?’ He said, ‘Yes, I will.’ The Hon. the Minister for Finance’s face turned white when he said that. He turned white. He could not believe the admission which had been made by Mr Feetham that actually there is an intention to tax big earners, whatever that may mean. *(Interjection)*

2085 And on the issue of Government contracts, which I want to dwell on, this is also another area of – sorry, Mr Feetham, relax, you are off the hook for now. On the issue of Government contracts this is another area of the way that the hon. Gentlemen do their politics and their governance, where we are seeing – and our policy is totally different, as we have expressed in our manifesto for the last election and the one before, which is that they are, in effect, given patrimony of the
2090 Government, assets of the Government to private companies.

I have made that point – and now Mr Origo has responsibility for Heritage – in relation to Knightsfield Holdings Ltd, which we have raised in the past in this House and which we will continue to raise because in the Budget Book this company is expected to receive £1.372 million for the year and extra from last year, £52,000. Yet, when the Hon. the Minister for Environment
2095 and Heritage is questioned in respect of Parson’s Lodge – which was the subject of some rudimentary, quite frankly, refurbishment, not enough – and he announced it just before the election as the result of the pressure that we were putting, he simply responds by saying that this is a private company and he cannot disclose any details. And, as long as they do not spend more money than what they are given he is not interested. What a way of governing your affairs.

2100 To boot, this is a company which has custody over many properties and tourist sites, which are simply not open, some of them, and not properly managed. The Moorish Castle is the subject of decay and has been for many years, and yet they are receiving £1.372 million this year.

2105 Why isn’t the activity of this company – which is draining public funds, and we are seeing no benefit as a result of that – the subject of a rescission of the contracts and the ending of the contract? We have a similar situation which I raised in the course of a Question & Answer session

recently on Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, which also has certain contracts to run certain assets, particularly the Alameda Gardens.

2110 This company is earmarked to receive £1.25 million this year of public funds, *our* money, taxpayers' money. Yet, when the Hon. the Minister responsible is asked for details about the company, which is then the beneficiary of a subcontract from Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, which is to be running the open-air theatre at the Alameda, 'I cannot answer the question, it is nothing to do with me. My relationship as Government is with the company, Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd.'

2115 This company is running the open-air theatre. This is wrong. This has to end and the public need to know whether this company, or this example is running its affairs properly. Is it providing value for money? Why should we not know what it receives? Should it receive anything from Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, or is it running a profitable business? But why was it given to that company? These are things which ought to be open.

2120 They will say, in anticipation, that the arrangements with Wildlife were entered into under our watch, which is true. But that would be a completely self-serving and fundamentally weak point because we are not arguing against contracts. What we say is that there is a need to move on and open them up. The public needs to know if we are to be truly open and transparent. These are public assets.

2125 Moving on to Mr Cortes. The hon. Gentleman clearly lives in a world of his own. Everything he does is great. When we raise issues about North Front Cemetery, which is overgrown with shrubbery, 'It is going to happen'. He then talks about in that context, it would now have an air of serenity, North Front Cemetery. He has been in office for 12 years, and it is shameful the way that cemetery is currently in terms again of its current state.

2130 Basic things which I appreciate are municipal in nature, but they do affect people: overhanging bushes on pavements, again, 'Not as far as I know'. Nothing to do with him. Pedestrians, he says in his speech, will continue to be given priority. What a joke. When some of them have to walk on the road because they cannot use the pavement.

2135 In relation to Line Wall Road, again when asked, I mean, the irony, I asked him about this – I cannot remember what day it was last week – and that there were issues of traffic in Line Wall Road. And the next day he said it was fine we have got cameras there. The next day there was a serious accident! Again, nothing to do with the hon. Member.

2140 On the Nature Reserve we have serious concerns about what we are sensing is the creeping privatisation of that huge asset, right bang in the centre of the Rock and so important to our tourist offering. With the World War II Tunnels Project, which was already the subject of refurbishment before the elections, now has been given to a private company. We ask about this, no answers from the hon. Gentleman.

And then in relation to ticket sales, also that is further privatisation. And at the end of the day, are there going to be loads of private companies running the Nature Reserve and we need to watch against that. Ah, he has already got closer to the hot seat, well done. (*Laughter*)

2145 The Hon. Mr Cortes, in his usual wordy way, makes a virtue of really saying nothing. Let him be reminded that the dementia and health facilities were actually GSD projects. They were completed by them, and I am not saying I am willing to admit that they may have been improved by them but they were actually GSD projects, so please do not reinvent their history.

2150 Let me remind the hon. Gentleman, a bit of bragging on our side, that we have also done many projects ourselves just to mention a few: King's Bastion Leisure Centre, although that does not exist. That did not happen under our watch. Chatham Counterguard: Orange Bastion and Calpe Barracks, for example. Those things were done under our watch. (*Interjection*) I will get on to the Airport shortly.

2155 His vision, in stark contrast, the Hon. Mr Cortes's vision, is limited in effect to eight new concrete slabs at Camp Bay. That is what we heard the other day and some ratings. A true visionary indeed. Then he has the gall to say that we had no vision. Yet, the hon. Gentleman had been relying on the Development Plan of 2009, which we introduced in Government. They have not moved to introduce the next one until now, which is now going to be *further* delayed.

2160 This should have been done and dusted by 2019 before the COVID pandemic hit. Everything should have been in place. They are the ones who are relying, in effect, on our vision as far as planning is concerned. There is no other logical reason to it.

2165 But I am not in any way surprised, coming from the hon. Gentleman – this is Mr Cortes – by his hubristic statement the other day when he gave his speech, where he talked about – I think it is a really weird word – he talked about the only ‘political assemblage. This is presumably the hon. Gentlemen and Ladies opposite, who would listen and has a clear vision on matters of heritage.

Where on earth does he get that from? Has the hon. Gentleman not read the opinion piece that was issued in the *Chronicle* by the Heritage Trust where they said, and I quote:

The reality on the ground is that although there is undoubtedly a lot of positive activity around tourism

so credit to the Hon. Mr Santos:

and ad hoc projects coming to fruition, there is no momentum and unifying vision that is drawing on all these efforts in together to underpin and consolidate potential gains.

2170 There is no underlying vision. That is what the Heritage Trust are saying. In Education also, it is incredible, the hon. Gentleman incredibly attributes at one point – I thought he was going to make a non-political statement where we could all bask in the glory of success that we as a people have enjoyed in terms of – which I think is true what I am saying, not just by way of example – in terms of our Education offering over the last 30, 40 years.

2175 But, no, he made a partisan and party-political statement saying in effect that they were wholly and singly, as a Government, responsible for the advances as a Gibraltarian population in education. A wholly aggressive party political stance and not very generous at all.

2180 As far as the Hon. Mr Feetham is concerned, he quoted Clement Attlee. I am very fond of Clement, I have read his book, we had a private chat about it, I think he has read it. It is a very interesting book, and he did a lot of good. But I am going to quote Margaret Thatcher. It is a very short quote, but I think applies – (*Interjection*) and they fit the bill. And it is this, and I think he can predict what I am about to say:

The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.

Which is what is happening to the hon. Gentleman opposite.

Then he says a rather bizarre statement as well. They need to check their brains when they jot these things down. When he says that our political interest, i.e. the GSD, is not to look after the working class. How can he say that?

2185 So, when he was with us, we were looking after the working class. But since he left, we are not. Is that the position? (*Interjection*) Is that the position, you know?

2190 Come on, I think we need to be a bit more rigorous in the way that we express ourselves, which is something (*Interjection*) – I am sure you will – that the Hon. Mrs Vasquez also needs to do. She needs to be much more vigorous. It was very obvious, I made allusion to some of the things that she was doing, that she was seeking to pitch herself again as part of a leadership campaign against the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, almost like doing a reply from that position.

2195 But she made *cheap* references, and I think rather shallow references, about the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition when he was Minister for Health in, I do not know, the dinosaur years. The first Administration, I think it was, of the GSD between 1996 and 2000. Trying clearly to slur mud at Mr Azopardi, blaming him for overspend. (*Interjection*)

2200 But that was not the point that the Hon. Mr Azopardi was making in response to the Hon. the Chief Minister. What he is saying and has said earlier this week, and he said at the last occasion that we had to debate last year’s Appropriation Bill, is that they are not being honest with the estimations as far as expenditure is concerned in order to massage the figures, in order to ensure that there is a surplus.

That was the basic point that the Hon. Mr Azopardi was saying. So what the hon. Lady was saying is not to the point at all, has got nothing to do with it. In that sense, with the greatest of respect to her, she has also failed.

2205 Her attacks on Mr Clinton were, quite frankly, also non-points. Non-points, which do not really merit a response. *(Interjection)* She kept on saying in her speech in relation to her various departmental responsibilities that there is a lot more to be done. She is right, that is always going to be the case, but she cannot forget, as I said before, that there is a history.

2210 That party has been in office now for 12, we say, very long and tiring years. She has to defend that record. She cannot come new to the job and say, 'I'm now here', as the Hon. Ms Orfila was saying during the course of a television debate. No, no, they throw things that the GSD did when we were not even in office. When I make that statement, I make it apply across the board.

2215 Although Mr Azopardi was a Minister for two terms, he then was not a Minister for the following two terms. They make that charge against us. So they cannot pretend that everything: draw a line and when Mrs Vasquez was sworn in as a Minister, that is a new approach. That is not going to work and we are going to make sure it is not going to work. And I am going to be reminding them of their record, and it is a record should *she* become the leader, that she is going to be reminded of day in, day out by us.

2220 We are still seeking a response. Where is that mysterious £10 million? Where is it? We have written to the hon. Member, we tried to elicit that information from her, I think on her suggestion that we write to her, and the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition wrote to her, whizzed the email across immediately in this Chamber, it was in May, 21st May, and we still did not have an answer. We thought that the answer was going to come during the course of an intervention, but she made absolutely no reference to it.

2225 So, I would ask the Hon. the Chief Minister to make a note of that point and give us full and frank disclosure of where that £10 million settlement figure, that was paid recently comes from, because we are still certainly not in the Book and therefore we are not alighted as to where that is coming from.

2230 On her announced initiative on the mental health facility relocation, the Heritage Trust – we raise a bit of an eyebrow as well on our side. The Heritage Trust has already raised the alarm. I think they issued a statement yesterday evening, referring to a lack of, and I quote, 'Any heritage consultations or assessments'.

2235 Where are the reports that Mr Cortes is so very fond of? Where is the vision that Mr Cortes is so very fond to refer to continuously when he his talking about his area of responsibility? What are the results of the many meetings that Mr Cortes attends, when they cannot get a basic thing right?

I would ask the Hon. the Chief Minister, although I do not have much hope, to advise who the benefactor is, because the hon. Government is at the receiving end of lots of monies from benefactors. Who is this benefactor? What is in it for them? Or is it just complete and utter charity? Maybe. *(Interjection)*

2240 Mr Santos, at the beginning of his contribution, said this:

Everyone has the right to lead true and authentic lives free from the fear of hostile or violent reactions from those around them.

We cannot disagree with what he says. He is absolutely right when he says that. *(Interjections)* But I think that the hon. Gentleman is going to agree with what I am about to say. I know he is sceptical, but he is going to agree. There has to be respect for all views.

2245 I am sure that he is aware and has read a lot of material on this, that there is a culture out there which people who have genuinely held beliefs, whatever they are, so long as it respects human rights, as the Hon. Chief Minister said, respects in effect, the law and is intrinsically respectful, you may have an opposing view on a certain issue or another.

2250 As Democrats, I think we can all agree that those views ought to also be respected and not to be – I am not suggesting that he is responsible for that in any way or anybody around in this Chamber, that we do not create in Gibraltar, and we need to be wary of what is happening elsewhere. In effect, cancel culture, where people’s businesses or people’s political positions or success, whatever, is affected negatively as a result of holding a view which may be contrary to another view.

2255 As he suggested to me and advised me that I should leave it there, I intend to, but I hope that he agrees with what I have just said.

2260 But I think that Mr Origo’s contribution in relation to that raised other issues in terms of the high suicide rates in the trans community, I think he said. So those things are things which ought to be debated and looked at more seriously, not simply the Pride march, the flags, the month and all the rest of it. There has to be a deeper analysis on how this permeates through the Education system and how we need to protect growing children and all the rest of it: and with respect and with a certain attitude, I think we can reach a place where there can be consensus; and Gibraltar, in that sense, should be a shining light.

2265 But I need to correct him as far as one factual error is concerned. I was not here in this Chamber, but in relation to the same-sex Marriage Bill, as I understand it, it was passed unanimously on 27th October 2016, i.e. with the support of this side of the House. It was a unanimous position that was adopted by this Parliament. *(Interjection)*

2270 The hon. Member makes a reference to the Air Terminal. He refers to the Air Terminal in glowing terms. I mean, wow. I know he has not been around, but I cannot ... The best word to use is W-O-W, because as he knows that was the subject of intense political debate and division, I think, led by the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister, and indeed the Chief Minister before their 2011 success.

Now to hear Mr Santos talk about the terminal in those terms, and I need to quote him, he says:

We are privileged to have this facility within our small grounds, which plays an indispensable role in our economy. Our Air Terminal is a gateway, not just to destinations but to possibilities.

(Interjections) Surely, he is referring to the current Air Terminal. I will repeat it:

Our Air Terminal is a gateway, not just to destinations but to possibilities.

2275 – and that we are privileged to have it.

This is fantastic, and I am really grateful that the hon. Gentlemen opposite have undergone this *Damascene* conversion in relation to this wonderful GSD project. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)**

Now, there were three things he failed to mention, as far as I recall. One is he talks about the campaign in the UK and the marketing logo, and I would say: where is *Fitur* in all of this?

2280 Where our friends in *La Linea* have a stall in *Fitur*. I would ask him to consider what I think is Government policy, which is not to attend *Fitur*, which is the sales fair in Madrid, given that the vast number of visitors that we have coming from Spain.

2285 He also, as the Minister for Justice, failed to mention – sorry, for Culture – the 1,000-seater theatre. Blank. No mention. Very surprised by that. *(Interjections)* But maybe the hon. Gentleman, the Chief Minister... I am just simply very surprised that the hon. Gentleman did not make a reference to it.

2290 Then he did not make any – if he made a reference, I think it may have been fleeting to the Future Job Strategy. He knows that that is a question I asked him at the time. No mention made. A flagship policy when they walked in, no mention made now by the Minister for Employment, and he talks about other initiatives, which may or may not be very good, so he only he made a reference to a few of them.

But no mention. So has there been an abandonment of this policy, which was much criticised by the GSD, indeed when Mr Feetham on that side was also a Member?

2295 As I said, he has launched a marketing campaign in the UK but he needs to grab the bull by the horns and deal with the issues that I referred to in my contribution earlier, of Knightsfield Holdings Ltd. And also, if I can ask him, to spruce up those entry points.

2300 The land frontier is in a *really* bad way and it is an embarrassment that this is the way that we should be welcoming our visitors. But not only that entry point, also at the Port and indeed the coach park at the midtown. So the description which he gave Gibraltar as ‘The jewel of the Mediterranean’ can be aptly applied.

2305 Moving on to the Minister for Housing. With the greatest of respect to her, and I am fond of her, I do not think she taught me, I think there was one art lesson and that is all. Although she is well-intentioned and well-meaning, I do not think that she has started on a good footing. We know that the hon. Member has wanted to be a candidate for that party over the last three or four elections but failed to get selected. So, it is probably because Mr Picardo did not want her.

2310 Maybe that is why she has decided to support the candidate, contrary to the candidate that Mr Picardo is fond of and is supportive. Well, that is typical of the hon. Gentleman. The hon. Gentleman is now hugging the Minister for Housing, but she needs to be careful about those kisses and those hugs, because they can be the kiss of death. (*Interjections*)

2315 But what is she doing? She is leading on the Ministry of Housing but has no charge over one of the central flagship policies, which is the construction in rather nebulous, unclear terms of public housing. They have been the subject of – I do not say criticism, but certainly of questions which have been raised by Action for Housing and questions by me on this side of the House, and they have failed to answer.

2320 They are under a manifesto promise – which they are very fond of saying that those things are cast iron, and they will be complied with – when they are not. And there is a history to that, they do *not* comply with all the manifesto promises. And they say that they are going to build additional general rental stock in housing or that the balance of rental homes will need to be increased. But these questions are always answered by the Chief Minister and not by her, who has direct political, departmental responsibility for this. Even then, we are simply treated to non-answers by the hon. Gentleman.

2325 Then the other flagship policy is a rent-to-repair scheme. She nods her head in eagerness. She is on a hiding to nothing. It is very clear that she has dedicated a very short element of her speech to it. It is very clear she is realising that what may have seemed attractive from a distance – something that was going to get people out of the housing list because they would pay for the repairs of the housing – that is not going to work because the fundamental point, which I hope she is realising now when she is speaking to all these officials and she is telling everybody she is having all these meetings all the rest of it, and we *still* do not have a formulated and published scheme – is that there is a huge cost in relation to infrastructure and clearing, which cannot conceivably be borne by the potential tenant who is on the housing waiting list.

2330 If it can, quite frankly, it is our policy, it is not theirs. He or she should not be on the housing waiting list in the first place. But she is not going anywhere with that, precisely because of these prohibitive expenses, in essence, and I will remind *her* –

2335 **Madam Speaker:** Hon. Member, please. The Hon. Minister.

Hon. D J Bossino: I will remind the Hon. Minister of her electoral promise, which very quickly slipped from her hands. It may have been a slip of the tongue because I think she tried to correct herself, on a GBC interview recently when she was questioning its viability. That is what she said.

2340 And Madam Speaker, on Road to the Lines, which is highly connected with this particular project, we have gone from what seemed to be an interesting proposal when it was under the charge and guidance and leadership of the Deputy Chief Minister, it was then shifted to the Ministry for Housing. And this is not a question of a month or two, as it is for the rent and repair scheme when we saw all the photographs in the *Chronicle*.

2345 Now, in effect, it has gone to Sir Joe Bossano as a clearing operation, in respect of which I have not received any answers because when I asked him who was doing the works, he said, 'Oh, it is not the Works. The Works do not include clearing'. I said, 'Who is doing it?' He would not answer. 'Which company is doing it?' He would not answer.

2350 So I need to file a Question at the next available opportunity. But he was not willing to answer. It has basically become a clearing operation. Again, where is that going? Another dog's dinner of a project.

2355 Before I move on, I need to share with her and Members opposite, the rather bizarre experience I had with her – and I would ask her not to do it again, but she can do whatever she wants – when I debated issues of housing on GBC, when she hardly allowed me to speak. I have been doing this for 30 years in Gibraltar and Spain and elsewhere, and I have never been treated to that type of behaviour.

2360 The Hon. the Minister for Health, I think, refers to Mrs Sanchez delving into Sálvame politics. If what she did at GBC was not Sálvame, I do not know what was. (*Interjections*) I would ask – oh, she says good. Well, no, but then the hon. Gentlemen think that they are introducing a different type of politics and the type of politics that we do is attack, attack and attack. Come on. She needs to change.

Then she talks about –

2365 **Madam Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt you again but could we refer to Members opposite as 'the Honourable'? I know the hon. Member is getting carried away but it is important. I have not interrupted you until now.

2370 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So the reference to third person 'she' is not acceptable? I am not getting carried away, I am just simply –

Madam Speaker: Well, let's use the word 'animated' then, if the hon. Member prefers.

2375 Pronouns are perfectly permissible. Do not start a sentence with 'she'. Start with 'the hon. Member' out of respect, both sides, and then you can proceed to use the pronoun in the follow-up sentence after the comma.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, of course, Madam Speaker, it is a bit of a challenge. I think it may be better off simply referring to the hon. Member on all occasions. I will remember when the sentence starts off.

2380 But the hon. Member referred to the Housing Act and it is about to be published, and she makes ... let me remind her of the GBC debates when she was there and I was shocked. Almost hot on the heels after an election and she looks at the representatives of the landlords, 'Oh, you are the representative of the landlord, okay, yes, we will meet.'

2385 That should have happened before the election like we did, and they should have had proposals. It was like new to the hon. Member. It was like new to the hon Member and she makes no reference in the context of the Housing Act to the issue. How is she going to deal with the serious issue which the private landlords are facing?

2390 All she says is that it is going to come up with a fairer outcome. Then she dismisses – and maybe the hon. Member is not aware of the history of this – the delays of Hassan Centenary, Bob Peliza, and Chatham, where we have shown press release after press release – and I know we will never agree on this. She refers to the delays being caused by COVID. *We* have said on more than one occasion that the chronology suggests otherwise. That promises were made in the previous elections in relation to these projects such that COVID should have had no or very little impact. (*Interjection*) And that, furthermore, the construction sector was one of the few sectors which were not impacted by COVID and were given a reprieve in terms of continuing activity during the lockdown period.

2395

2400 Then she says that it is a fact that in Gibraltar all young people – I mean what a sweeping and incorrect statement, and she needs to consider that and withdraw it. Young people are entitled and will get a flat. That is not true! Housing is one of the biggest issues, social issues, that we are approached on as an Opposition. Because there are many young people who feel disenfranchised from a house. That is fine. I am not criticising them for whatever reason, because the finances were not there, all the rest of it, but let's have a proper debate. She cannot then say that everything is hunky-dory. It is not. She is going to end up in the same parallel universe that Mr Cortes lives, and that is not good for her.

2405 So, the Hon. Mr Bruzon, out of courtesy to all the Members of the House, I would simply say this in relation to his contribution. That is that he rightly says – absolutely rightly says – that entering the political arena does have an effect on our families and all the rest of it.

2410 I go back to the first point, you will recall, that I made, which is precisely because of that we should make life as easy as reasonably possible, because at the end of the day this is a vocational job that we do. We all do it here because we want to serve the public and the community, but there are basic manners and etiquette which, if discharged by the Leader of the House, would go a long way to assuage the sharper elements of having a family member involved in politics, as he rightly mentioned.

To that degree, I would agree with the statement that he had made but I would extrapolate from that the linkage that I make in relation to the initial point that I made.

2415 So, Madam Speaker, finally, as I said when I started this is a weak – I was going to say wicked – Government riddled with internecine divisions. It is on its last breaths and I will certainly not be voting in favour of the Bill.

2420 **Madam Speaker:** All right. Would the mover of the Bill like to reply?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, very much so, because we have now had the opportunity to hear the contributions of all Members of the House. This debate is a hugely important debate. It is the debate where we are looking at the Appropriation and the Appropriation is what is going to enable us to run Government for the next year.

2425 This afternoon we have heard the Leader of the Opposition – sorry, we have heard the putative Leader of the Opposition reply to every single one of the Government speeches. Usually a Leader of the Opposition replies to the speech of the Chief Minister or in London to the speech of a Prime Minister. I suppose it is the sweeper that replies to other Government speeches.

2430 So today, having heard the speech from the sweeper, the hon. Member has ensured that we have a good view from the Government benches of how they have seen the contributions of hon. Members on this side of the House.

2435 Usually, Madam Speaker, that is not the case. We hear contributions from hon. Members in each of their areas of departmental responsibility and then I deal with issues on behalf of the Government in respect of all of the criticism that has been put of the Bill. This has been a little bit different in terms of the way that the Opposition have decided to represent their views. They have wanted to have a sweeper for them to deal with the issues that we have presented. I think that has been very useful.

2440 I thank the Hon. Mr Bossino, first of all, because he has set the tone. He has set what can best be described as an intemperate 'toys-out-of-the-pram' tone, which belies an obvious bitterness, I think is the word that the Leader of the Opposition used – but obviously it is the mote in their own eye that they are talking about – an obvious bitterness that, by whatever the margin, we won the general election. An obvious bitterness that despite all the things, as the hon. Gentleman has just said to the Minister for Housing, despite all the things that they did, which they believe should be done before the general election, they did not win the general election.

2445 Despite all of the advice that we have seen from the hon. Gentleman to all of the putative leadership candidates that he has decided to identify on this side of the House, based on anything he may have been told on his walk down from the House every morning, avoiding those green

2450 parts of Gibraltar that he tells us we have to prune, the hon. Gentleman knows – because he has suffered countless repeated defeats – that he, of course, would be the worst person to take advice from in the context of either a leadership election or a general election. (*Interjection*) Well, it is as relevant, Madam Speaker, as the person who gave the advice made it.

Madam Speaker, it cannot be relevant in this debate to talk about the leadership elections in the GSLP, which are not even on foot, but not to reply to the hon. Gentleman who has made the point.

2455 So, Madam Speaker, in responding to the hon. Gentleman and to all of the contributions that we have had from the various hon. Ladies and Gentlemen on the other side, I am going to reflect overnight on exactly how much detail to go into, in dealing with the points that have been made, which do not relate to the appropriation. This debate should not be where the hon. Gentleman has taken it. This debate should be on the Appropriation and on what is going to happen next in
2460 respect of the public finances of Gibraltar.

A State of the Nation debate, of course, deals with other areas of policy. It does not have to deal with issues which are esoteric. But the hon. Gentleman has made them relevant.

Adjournment

Chief Minister: (Hon. F R Picardo): So, Madam Speaker, with that, I would now propose that the House should adjourn until tomorrow morning at the hour of 11 o'clock when I shall deal with
2465 all of the contributions that I have heard from hon. Members, including hon. Members on this side of the House.

Some of what hon. Members said on this side of the House, I think, has been a salutary demonstration of the incredibly hard work that is put in by Government Ministers day in, day out; and some of what we have heard on the other side is a salutary demonstration of the fact that
2470 opposition politics sometimes can be as simple as coming here and then verbally throwing one's toys out of the pram.

So I move, Madam Speaker, that the House should now adjourn to tomorrow at 11 a.m.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House should adjourn to
2475 tomorrow morning at 11 a.m. I now put the question, which is that this House should adjourn to 11 o'clock tomorrow morning. Those in favour? (**Members: Aye.**) Those against? Passed.

This House will now adjourn to 11 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 7.30 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 11 a.m. – 3.45 p.m.

Gibraltar, Friday, 5th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 11 a.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 — Second Reading — Debate continued

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Friday, 5th July 2024.
Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill 2024 continued.

5 **Madam Speaker:** Would the Hon. Chief Minister like to add anything to his reply?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, of course, because there have been consequential events overnight in the United Kingdom and that is where I must start this morning. For the first time in history, what we have seen, in the context of the results that are now confirmed in respect of the seats allocated to different parties in the Westminster Parliament, is that there will be a socialist government in the United Kingdom, there is a socialist government in Spain and there is a Socialist Liberal Government in Gibraltar. So, for the first time in history since democracy returned to Spain, since we have had democracy in Gibraltar, there is going to be an opportunity for those of us who are of the left to see an ideological line drawn from London through Madrid to Gibraltar. I do not believe this could have come at a more important time. Of course, that impacts these numbers and this debate because it will impact the opportunities to continue to seek to finalise these new treaty arrangements between the United Kingdom and the European Union in relation to Gibraltar.

Keir Starmer will become Prime Minister of the United Kingdom today if, as all predictions indicate, Rishi Sunak, who is Prime Minister, goes to see the King this morning to offer his resignation and the King then offers Mr Starmer the opportunity to form a government. We have to say it in that way because although it is obvious that that is what is going to happen, there are constitutional niceties that require that we say 'if', but it is now as near as damn it clear that that is what is going to happen. I have known Keir Starmer for many years. I was with him in the Cayman Islands on the day that the Twin Towers came down. We were both involved in a symposium on human rights with Ed Fitzgerald at the time, who introduced us. I have since worked professionally and politically with Mr Starmer and I very much look forward to working with Keir Starmer the Prime Minister. I have known Pedro Sanchez also for many years and met him on a number of occasions. So, for the first time, the Chief Minister of Gibraltar is on first-name terms with the Prime Minister of Spain and the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, another hugely important opportunity to try to leverage those friendships, those political alliances, for the benefit of Gibraltar without crossing any red lines. That does not mean that we agree on everything, that we are not going to disagree, that there are not opportunities even for vehement disagreement, of course, but there are now opportunities that have not been there before.

35 I was heartened to hear David Lammy say publicly that which he has expressed directly to us and, in particular, which Stephen Doughty has expressed directly to us, that the Labour Party is

ready in government to move from where Lord Cameron left the negotiation at a political level, although it has continued at a technical level. Mr Lammy shared those views with the Foreign Press Association in London 48 hours ago, talking of what would happen if he became Foreign Secretary, although saying that he was very firmly of the view that if Labour won the election he would be Foreign Secretary because his discussions with Sir Keir had led him to that conclusion. I very much look forward to meeting with Mr Lammy when he becomes Foreign Secretary and continuing the excellent working and human relationship that we have enjoyed with successive Foreign Secretaries, not least David Cameron, whom the Deputy Chief Minister and I have known for many years.

Overnight, I was very pleased to see James Cleverly, who is one of my best friends in the Conservative Party, keep his seat. He has been a very dedicated Member of Parliament for Gibraltar whenever he has had any responsibility – and whenever he has not had political responsibilities, continued to care about Gibraltar and stay in touch with us. He has strong personal bonds with Gibraltar, so I was very pleased to see him keep his seat – a *real* friend.

In 1997, it was all about whether you were up for Portillo. I dare say last night was whether you were up for Rees-Mogg. I am not sorry to see Mr Mogg leave the Commons, because his views in relation to the Government of Gibraltar's policy in relation to the sovereignty of Gibraltar were not views that anybody could reasonably share. They betrayed a misunderstanding of issues relating to the sovereignty of Gibraltar, which put me in mind of the worst aspects of how the Conservative Party had dealt with Gibraltar in the 1980s, something that happily was not the case once the Conservative Party returned to Opposition, supported us through the joint sovereignty debacle, and then in government have been very supportive of us also.

One of the best moments of last night is that a person of Gibraltar heritage has become Member of Parliament for Finchley and Golders Green – Sarah Sackman MP, as she now is. I was delighted to see that she had turned that race around, and it is a testament not just to her own work but also to the work of Keir Starmer in changing the way that the Labour Party had been seen as anti-Semitic, in particular in that constituency, which is heavily Jewish. I think that every Gibraltar will want to celebrate the election of Ms Sackman to the Labour benches, and we shall follow her career with interest from Gibraltar. She enjoys the congratulations of all Members of the Government, and no doubt all Members of the House.

It is important to thank the outgoing Prime Minister and the outgoing Conservative government for their support since 2010 to successive Governments of Gibraltar, the lion's share of that time in our administration. I do that, and I have written this morning to Rishi Sunak as Prime Minister, for he is still Prime Minister, to thank him on his last day in office for his support in his time as Prime Minister and that of his Conservative predecessors since 2010.

As a socialist, I am, of course, delighted, but I am very conscious of the fact that we are in a coalition with the Liberal Party, who are also the great winners of the election overnight in the United Kingdom. They have gone from eight seats to 71 at the latest tally, which really is a remarkable ... I would say comeback, but it is more than just a comeback. This is Liberals going further and getting more seats than ever before since they were in government at the turn of the 20th century.

So, a real sea change in the United Kingdom, which we hope will be good for the United Kingdom ... even Conservative Members of Parliament who are losing their seats, like Robert Buckland, who has elegantly said that he believes that the change will be good for Britain because those coming in are coming in in good faith to make changes which they believe are good for the United Kingdom.

Madam Speaker, that dealt with, and it is important that that be dealt with because this is a consequential change, which –

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Will the hon. Member give way?

Hon. Chief Minister: I assume, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman wants to address the issue of the UK general election, and on that basis I will give way.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, before he launches into his reply proper, I simply wanted to also acknowledge the events overnight, congratulate the Labour Party on their landslide victory, congratulate Keir Starmer on prospectively becoming Prime Minister later today and acknowledge the efforts of the Conservative government in the past in defence of Gibraltar. There have been times, of course, with both Conservative and Labour administrations, where the people in Gibraltar have felt that we have not been defended enough, but now is not the time to dwell on that. I associate myself with the remarks of the Chief Minister on the success of Sarah Sackman, of Gibraltarian descent, in England yesterday, in a London constituency. We hope that this very big majority Labour will ... it augurs well for the people of Gibraltar and that Keir Starmer will be a staunch defender of Gibraltar, our rights and interests.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, on to the substance of the Bill at hand. You may not have sat for quite so long on such a long argument without a jury or without having to be asked to make a decision at the end of it all.

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Madam Speaker: I must say I am tempted to write a judgment at the end of it, but I will restrain myself. *(Laughter)*

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, do not tempt me to ask you to write one, because there are some things that we will have to address.

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In addressing this reply, in my first Budget after the last General Election, which I already said is the last General Election in which I will lead my party, I think it is important that hon. Members reflect a little on what they have said is my style in reply. They have called me many things and they have made many comparisons, none of which has the benefit of them being genuinely reflective and looking back at the things that we, on the GSLP Liberal side, were subjected to by the GSD when they were in government and we were in opposition. And so, I want to put it to them, in the context of the way that I am going to present these arguments, and indeed the way that I presented my arguments in the past, that my bite is worse than my bark. That is to say I may present the arguments in a way that I hope captures people's imagination and therefore enables them to understand what I am trying to say, but it is the facts that I put on the table that are devastating to their reputations, not the things that I may say about their style. That is the reality of how I am going to, I hope, demonstrate that the reasons that hon. Members have said that they are not going to be supporting this Bill are actually not good reasons. I will deal with all of the areas where hon. Members actually descended to the particulars of the Bill and did not just talk about general politics and demonstrate that in those areas they are wrong about the things that they have said. That is where my bite will be: on the facts, on the data and on the finances.

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I have to say also that I have been hugely impressed by some of the speeches of new hon. Members in this House. For people who were losing their parliamentary virginity in the context of a debate on the public finances, I have to say that Ministers on this side of the House have all done an incredible job, and some new Members on the other side have also done so. If I may say so, with respect, I thought that the youngest Member of this House actually presented one of the speeches that was most balanced and pointed because he did so without calling us anything, other than saying that in some areas we could do better. Well, I agree with him. In some areas, we can do better, not just in politics, not just in government and not just on the public finances, but in life. I think that is what life is about, trying to make every day better. My mother used to say to me, 'Make the good better and the better best'. That is the endeavour on which we are embarked. He did that without having to say anything about my leadership, my lineage, my parentage, all the sorts of things that hon. Members on the other side too often fall into the trap of thinking that they need to gild their lilies with in order to be able to achieve success in argument.

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140 I was minded also, in the context of hearing him when he was talking to us about
disengagement of young people in politics, that perhaps the problem is that politicians sometimes
make politics about politics itself. We sometimes perhaps overindulge ourselves and make politics
145 about other politicians. That may be one of the reasons that young people switched off. I do not
think that there is any young person in Gibraltar today, thinking about where they are going to go
tonight and how they are going to enjoy themselves over the weekend, who cares about what the
Hon. Mr Bossino thinks about the Hon. Mr Feetham's Father's Day Facebook post. I think they
care about matters relating to scholarships, apprenticeships, future jobs, the climate, etc.
Sometimes when we are busy looking at our navels, we are failing to look at the horizon, and
I think the Hon. Mr Origo was right to point that out, perhaps not exactly in those terms but it is
150 what I took from what he said.

I was drawn to the fact that in one of the Budget replies that I did, I think two or three years
ago, I analysed the fact that this debate about debt has been going on since 1971. Apart from
liking the odd fast car, I do enjoy my *Hansard*, Madam Speaker, and so I spend a lot of time reading
old *Hansards*. I found a debate that I think predated even the Hon. the Father of the House and
155 involved issues being put then between 1969 and 1972 when the IWBP were in government and
the AACR were opposition, and after 1972 with the AACR in government and the DPBG and the
others in opposition. I was able to show the House exactly the same terminology that we were
using today was being used on debt – too much debt, etc. The numbers were lower but
proportionally probably the same. I do think that the fact that this has continued from Sir Bob
160 Peliza to Sir Joshua Hassan and Sir Joe Bossano, continued into the time of Sir Peter Caruana ...
There are a lot of knights there, arguing for years, Madam Speaker. It is all about the same thing
and it is always fundamental. It is always the same argument. Of course it is relevant, but how is
it that we are losing the audience?

We are running a £¾ billion company here. We have an income of £750 million a year. If you
165 are running a household, it is very difficult to associate the finances of a household with the
finances of a country. You talk about the fact that something costs £200,000 and people might
say, 'For goodness' sake, what are these people talking about, £200,000? I have to make ends
meet with much less than that.' But to run this country today we are taking an income of
£750 million and we have an expenditure of just shy of that. This is the question of balancing the
170 Budget, making sure always that our income is more than our expenditure. We need to explain
that to our people in a way that is less self-indulgent.

For the purposes of the record, I would set out that if anybody looks at my speech on Monday,
I do not think there was anything in there which attacked hon. Members directly, personally or
otherwise. It attacked their record in government but not them. They are right in saying that I
175 would now say that in their responses they indulged in being a lot more personal than that. In
fact, I have just heard the Hon. Mr Bossino say, 'You see, we predicted it exactly'. Well, of course
they predicted it exactly, because I did not insult them and they did insult me. The only prediction
that they have been accurate in is in demonstrating that in a speech that can be analysed by any
third party to show that there were no insults, they countered with speeches that analysed by any
180 third party would result in, clearly, us being the subject of the sharpest part of their tongues. We
have heard about wolves, vultures and carcasses from hon. Members on the other side. Well, I
will let them know there is life in the old dog yet. Reports of my political death are greatly
exaggerated. We need to start talking more about the things that matter to people and less about
these bear attacks that the Hon. Mr Bossino told us he was going to deploy and then *clavao*, as he
185 says is exactly what he came to do, to attack. The only thing that Mr Bossino is able to accurately
predict is his own behaviour, so he predicts he is going to attack, he comes here, he attacks and
then he says, 'You see, exactly as I said'. Well, quite, of course.

Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate all new Members without exception and I want to tell
them that in the context of this place, politics, and this debate in particular, when I get things right
190 they are down to my team. When the Estimates are right, when we get a measure that is right,
they are down to the people advising me. But it is in the nature of this job and in the nature of the

responsibility that you carry when you become Chief Minister of Gibraltar that when things go wrong or when they were not quite right, they are down to me, because the buck stops with me. I fully take responsibility for all of the things that hon. Members can point to as a matter of policy and say, 'You did this and it was wrong. You did this and you turned.' Absolutely. The measure on
195 company taxation – the company levy that we did not proceed with – the pedestrianisation of Line Wall Road, and now the measure in respect of the pollution levy: political responsibility for those things lies with me, of course it does. In particular, those three are unforced errors, and therefore *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, as Mr Bossino, I think, says most mornings.
200 So, let's be clear, we are not shirking that responsibility.

JFK, in his famous inaugural, when he said, 'Do not ask what America can do for you, ask what you can do for America', said something else. It is not oft referred to, but it is a hugely important speech in terms of public service, not just of those in public service but of every citizen's obligation to the whole. He said, 'Together we shall save our planet, or together we shall perish in its flames.'
205 In that year, the President of the United States was looking, in the most difficult moments of the Cold War, at the potential for a nuclear Armageddon to engulf the whole of the world, but today, 60 years later, 'perishing in the flames of the planet' has more resonance when applied to the climate change that we can see coming than it does in every other respect. So, if we have made a mistake in trying to populate our Climate Change Fund with a levy, in trying to reduce pollution,
210 and in the way that we introduced that measure, well, we made a mistake for a good reason and in good faith. We fully accept that and we shall not be proceeding in any way with that pollution levy, because we get it. We are not tone deaf. We are clear that when we get something wrong we have to change it, and we got it wrong.

It is also true that in explaining that outside of this place, I made a mistake because people
215 have interpreted that my seeking to show that this levy would apply to me also as a driver has been suggested by people to be me somehow bragging or showing off. Nothing could be further from the truth. This particular vehicle that I referred to is not something that I have ever kept hidden and I disclosed on that day. Indeed, most mornings I toot my horn at Mr Bossino when I am coming back from taking my son to school in this Porsche, and he gaily waves back. There was
220 no secret here. I do not have an invisibility cloak that I have put around the car. But that misinterpreting is something I also feel terribly about, because sometimes appearances deceive. I pay £160 a month for this car, hardly the most expensive. Other brands are less remarkable. If you say that you have a Kia and you pay £600 a month for it, nobody will say that you have a luxury. If you pay £160 for a Porsche, it sounds like a luxury. If you drive a Discovery, like hon.
225 Members opposite – I make no criticism of them – it is worth three times the car that I drive, but of course, the marque matters and I accept that. There was absolutely no attempt to do anything other than brag, but I do want to clarify that the law applies to all of us and I did not import this vehicle outside of the rules on importation of vehicles older than 10 years. This vehicle was registered in Gibraltar when I bought it.

Madam Speaker, the fact is that people do not elect a Pope. I am not infallible. I am not the one who thinks that he is speaking from St Peter's chair. Those times have come and gone. We are not always right. We are not always perfect. Hon. Members were accusing us of making a U-turn, but if you are doing a measure and that measure is wrong and you stop it, you are asked to listen. If you listen and you stop and you change, you are accused of making a U-turn. U-turns
235 are about navigation. The only way to do good and proper navigation is to do a U-turn when you are going in the wrong direction. If your political enemies want you to continue going down that road, then you are even better off to say, 'No, that was not right, it is time to turn and go in a particular direction,' but in relation to those issues, not in relation to the fundamental issues on which we have always stayed the course whilst others have changed.

So, it is absolutely right to do a little bit of soul-searching when you seem to have got something wrong. It is absolutely right to go back to the drawing board and understand why you got it wrong. It is, in my view, one of the problems that the Hon. Mr Origo was pointing to. When you fall into the trap of this comic-book-style politics, where you either get everything right all of the time or
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245 you are not able to continue to discharge office, I do not think that that is, by any stretch of the
imagination, how we have presented ourselves. We have never presented ourselves as infallible,
far from it, because to do that would be the politics of the false prospectus, and the false
prospectus is what got Britain into the bind it is in: the false prospectus of Brexit, the false
prospectus which is the tabloid comic-book politics that we shall not ever pretend to be
responsible for. What people have with this Government is competence, competence on all the
250 issues that matter and confidence enough to fess up to a mistake the minute that we see it is a
mistake. I know that our political opponents would wish that having made a mistake, we continue
to dig. That is why we have been able to succeed successively in our representation of Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker, where we have got it right is in relation to the most important issue, which is
our external relations. I think that is absolutely clear. Hon. Members can do the list of the three
255 things that they say we have U-turned on, that we got wrong – I will repeat them for them: the
company levy, Line Wall Road and the pollution levy that we are not proceeding with – but no one
on this side of the House has ever for one moment suggested that we should give responsibility
for our external relations to the President of the European Commission, which is exactly what the
Leader of the Opposition suggested in an article in the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, the date of which I have
260 referred him to on a number of occasions. I think it is clear that that is exactly what happened.
None of us on this side of the House have done an academic analysis to suggest that Andorra is
not joint sovereignty. These are the fundamentals, and on the fundamentals we get it consistently
right. That is what matters.

I want to also react to what we saw happen on Monday evening. I *fundamentally* respect and
265 defend the right to protest. It goes to the core of what we represent on this side of the House.
Indeed, I trust it goes to the core of what hon. Members represent. It goes to the core of what
living in a free society is all about and what our constitutional freedom of assembly is all about. I
defend the right to protest. I defend the right to protest outside No. 6. I have protested outside
No. 6. That is democracy. I respect many of the issues that people who were protesting outside
270 No. 6 were raising. I hope to be able to address some of them during the course of this debate. I
hope to be able to meet some of the people who were outside No. 6 to address their areas of
concern, the issues that affect their day-to-day lives in these hard times through which we are
living. I fully get it. I am absolutely not tone deaf to that, but by the same token, I am sure that
every Member of this House and most members of our community, if not all members of our
275 community on reflection, will also join me in saying that whilst we respect and defend the right to
protest, *none of us* considers that there is a right to threaten personal violence or criminal damage,
and I would hope that the whole House would be united in that respect.

We have seen the effect of demagoguery on the 6th January riots on Capitol Hill in the United
States. That was not what we were seeing here, that was not what happened here on Monday,
280 but outside of what happened on Monday outside No. 6, there has been a cohort of online
anonymous cowards who have made threats of physical violence and criminal damage against me
and members of my family. Frankly, although I am sure that that will never come to pass, because
these are just cowards hiding behind an anonymous profile on social media, that is not the
Gibraltar that any of us deserve on either side of this House or outside of this House. Those who
285 seek the cloak of secrecy and lack of transparency are, in my view, nothing more than cowards in
a society like ours. (*Banging on desk*) Thank you. I am very pleased that we have unanimity on
that, Madam Speaker. If what we are seeing is people who want to lie and have the cloak of
anonymity for that purpose, then people should understand that those who are anonymous are
lying. If they put their name to things, they have to be able to defend the truth of what they say.
290 The most disgraceful and nefarious allegations are made with impunity because the social media
platform is in the United States. I trust I speak for all Members of the House in condemning such
sick and cowardly behaviour. That is not how we do business in Gibraltar.

I have seen, however, some of the points that some of the people protesting outside No. 6
were making and I think they are very credible points that need to be addressed in the context of
295 this debate in particular, addressing the point that Mr Origo was making about young people, but

more broadly about people generally in Gibraltar if they have these issues, a lot of which have been debated in this House but the argument has not cut through. It is important that we spend the time making these arguments and understanding them together so that, as a community, we can move forward together.

300 The first point that they make is about the pollution levy, and I want to be clear and say the pollution levy is dead and buried. It is not coming back. I have heard people say, 'Leave our cars alone.' I am leaving their cars alone.

People are saying if tax goes down 1% but the Minimum Wage has only gone up 30p, this does not cover the 5% Social Security increase. What is moving there is the cap, by 5%. It is not that
305 Social Security is going up by 5%. That is not what we have done. We have moved the cap by 5%, so that the salaries affected are moved. There is not an increase of 5%.

Then people say, 'You are putting up electricity and water by 2.6%.' Well, yes, that is what we need to do, but let's be very clear, that is 0.004p per unit, so it would not be correct to say that the tax decrease, or indeed the increase in the Minimum Wage, does not cover the increase in
310 electricity, because although one sounds, in percentage terms, like the other – the Minimum Wage is going up 3% and water and electricity are going up 2.4% – when the Minimum Wage goes up, it is going up by 30p, and when the water and electricity go up, they are going up by 0.004p. We are not giving with one hand and taking away with the other.

Rent has also increased, people say, and that was not in the Budget speech. No,
315 Madam Speaker, we said some years ago that we needed to put this on to a framework which did not put us in a situation where rents stayed so low that they were ludicrous. Rents had not gone up in something like 30 years; the GSD put them up once. We wanted to ensure that when rents went up they went up very slowly but they went up very surely, so that they stayed relevant but they did not hurt. That is why we said rents will go up by inflation. They will go up in April, which
320 is when the new financial year starts. We passed that law. I seem to recall we passed that law with the support of hon. Members opposite. There was a discussion about that in this House. We stopped the increase when inflation was 11%. We said, 'Hang on a minute, we have a mechanism here to raise housing rents by inflation, but this year, this 11%, post-COVID, with the war in
325 Ukraine and fuel prices going through the roof and the Liz Truss-Kwarteng Budget pushing interest rates up further, we are going to actually act to stop the increase.' Last year, because it was such a hike, we stopped the increase and said it would continue next year. We said that during the Budget debate last year and that is why there was no repeating it here, because that is something that happened last year and in April.

People are saying public sector workers get a small pay increase. It is not necessarily a small
330 pay increase. In the context of the entry grade, pay in Gibraltar has gone up by 20% in the past two years, because the entry grade has gone up from £18,000 to something like £22,000. On top of that, people on the entry grade salary are getting the £1,200 last year, non-consolidated, and the £1,200 this year, consolidated. Going through the pay scales just on this year, I think anybody under £50,000 is getting close to 3%, 4%, 5% pay increases, and then it goes down to inflation at
335 between £50,000 and £75,000 – and I will do more of an analysis later on – and then, between £75,000 to £100,000, it is a much lower pay increase, but the pay increase, because it is consolidated this year, goes throughout.

People then say, 'But why does this just happen in the public sector? Why aren't you putting up pay in the private sector?' For a simple reason: I do not control pay in the private sector. The
340 unions have a negotiating framework with private sector employers in different sectors. They do very well in those negotiations. We support them in it. The way that we support them is the part and the element that we do control, which is the Minimum Wage. The Minimum Wage was not always something that applied in Gibraltar. The Minimum Wage was introduced after 1988 in Gibraltar by the first Socialist Labour administration, by the Father of the House. It did not come
345 into the United Kingdom until the Blair government in 1997, so 10 years after it came in in Gibraltar. We introduced that from the Socialist Labour benches to have an element of a lever in the private sector, and this year we have put it up by 3%. That might not seem much. That is why

I wanted to do the exercise, saying it may not seem much now but look at how much the Minimum Wage has gone up under our administration. It has gone up by £2,750 in three years. That is almost a thousand pounds in the last three years. It has gone up by £6,500 since we took over. That is, in effect, £500 a year on the 39-hour week.

Hon. Members opposite sometimes say that one of the things that they pray in aid of their arguments is how the Chamber and the Federation of Small Businesses say they are disappointed with our Budget. Well, they cannot have it both ways, because this is one of the things that disappoints the Chamber and the Federation. We believe that the Minimum Wage had to first be upped from where it was, it was not high enough, and then had to keep pace with inflation. The Chamber say – and they represent their members, of course, I understand that – ‘It is too high, you are pushing it too high.’ They say they agree with the Chamber and the Federation. No problem. That is why we are a party of the left (**A Member:** Yes.) and they are not. But let’s be clear, Madam Speaker, if you are outside No. 6 Convent Place and people there are saying the Minimum Wage has not gone up, and you are standing there with them and you agree with the Chamber and the Federation, you are standing at least on different shores of the pavements outside Convent Place.

I fully respect those who say the Minimum Wage has not gone up enough. I wish I could put it up more. I want us to get to a living wage. That is what the Father of the House is talking about, upping productivity. We want fewer jobs on the Minimum Wage, more jobs on the higher salaries. That is why we are putting up the Minimum Wage. In judging how we have put it up and judging Members opposite – and the leader of the GSD today was the Deputy Chief Minister in a GSD Government for four years, of which he was a Member for eight years but was only Deputy Chief Minister for four years – the GSD did this thing called the ‘election gimmick’. They would put up the Minimum Wage every election year and not the other years. We can point to always putting up the Minimum Wage at least by inflation and having put it up by much more than inflation, which is why it has gone up £6,500 in the time that I am here – £500 per year, in effect. I hope people understand that, because it is important that they see this in the context of how these issues have evolved and how although I cannot put up salaries in the private sector I am trying to stimulate salaries in the private sector by doing two things: putting up salaries in the public sector, which is the competitor to the private sector in salary terms and terms; and pushing up the bottom in the private sector with the Minimum Wage.

On COVID, people say, ‘Look, we understand,’ – the public actually says that in a way that is more comprehensible than sometimes the Opposition say it, because the Opposition supported this £500 million borrowing – ‘but do you have to repay the COVID debt by taking from me? Can’t you find another stream of income from which you might pay the COVID debt?’ Well, that is the job that we are trying to do. We are trying to bring other streams of income so that we produce other sources of income and revenue for the public finances, so that that goes towards the £500 million. But we nonetheless have to continue to run our affairs in keeping with the golden rule, and the amounts left over have to go to the COVID debt because what we cannot do is, having incurred the COVID debt to pay our generation, leave the debt to future generations without taking responsibility for it. I know that that is not what people want, but it is the way that we have to balance the books. To an extent, you elect a government to make these difficult decisions and get that calibration right, which we think we did get right in this Budget, other than for the issue of the pollution levy.

Another thing that people are saying is, ‘It is all very good that you get an additional amount at the bottom because you are dealing with the bottom pay; what about the rest of the salaries?’ What we are dealing with is parity, and it is at the bottom that there are parity issues with the United Kingdom but we are committed to parity. I said so in my speech. If there are parity issues elsewhere, if elsewhere in the scales we miss parity with the UK, we will adjust to parity because the parity agreements relate to all and each of the grades, except the grades have changed a lot in the United Kingdom, and that is why we are still talking to the unions about where the landing points are. The entry point upping is not just about the entry point, it is about parity, and that will

400 happen in other grades also. But of course, the increase cuts across the spine points because you
are getting £1,200 consolidated on all spine points below £50,000, you are getting £900 on all
spine points between £50,000 and £75,000, and £600 on all spine points between £75,000 and
£100,000 on basic pay. So, the push is across the spine scales below £100,000.

Another issue that people who protested are saying is relevant is that they want us to stop
405 enforcing parking rules and they want us to build more multistorey car parks which we do not
charge Gibraltarians for. Well, we have been the pioneers of that. We built a very large multistorey
car park here which we do not charge Gibraltarians for. We did not build it as a pay and display,
as hon. Members opposite did in respect of Devil's Tower Road. It is expensive. We are making
revenue from that by selling some of the parking spaces, renting others, charging foreign nationals
410 and giving Gibraltarians three hours free. If we are able to do more, we will. People say there are
too many high-rise buildings for the rich, which seems to be Government's favourite activity, I
hear that they say. Actually, the Deputy Chief Minister is spending most of his time fighting people
who want to put up high-rise buildings which do not fit in with how we see Gibraltar should be
developing. We do not do any high-rise building for the rich; none of it, zero. We do high-rise
415 building for affordable homes, which is what we have done at Hassan Centenary Terraces. When
we sell land, or where they sold land, the premium that we are paid for that land is invested in the
Government General Account and that is what then enables us to build affordable housing for our
people or rental housing for our people. I hope that also is understood. It may sound simple to do,
but it is very expensive to build a multistorey car park and not recover the money from charging
420 for car parking. I hope that – I am sure – is understood.

Madam Speaker, the other issue that people are raising is why haven't yet equalised the
pensionable age? I think the Father of the House, who understands this area better than most,
has been very clear in his explanations. He has suggested how dangerous it could be for Gibraltar
if we were to do that before we have settled matters relating to Social Security in the context of
425 our future relationship with the EU and how well we will be able to do it more beneficially for all
residents of Gibraltar, in particular men, if we are able to do it at the right time. I know that time
passes. On the treaty – and I will say this on a number of occasions during the course of my address
this morning – you can solve that issue quickly, you can do the treaty quickly, of course you can,
but then you will be doing the treaty that somebody else wants you to do. If you want to do the
430 right treaty, you have to take the time to negotiate it, and fight through all of the things that we
have heard in the Spanish Senate etc., to do a deal that is safe and secure and beneficial. If that is
what doing the Social Security deal and other things is dependent on, those things have to be
delayed. Otherwise, we allow those things to become a pressure on us to concede something in
the negotiation, and that is not how we do negotiations on this side of the House. I am sure that
435 every Gibraltarian will understand that although this delays our ability to deliver on our cast-iron
commitment to do an equalised pensionable age for pensioners across the gender divide, we
cannot accelerate it if that means ceding on fundamentals in the context of the negotiation or
getting up from the negotiation when in fact there is a chance we could continue to successfully
negotiate.

440 Zero-hour contracts needing to stop is one of the issues that concern people. I agree. It is in
our manifesto. We are working on it in respect of government contracts.

And why should government rates for everything go up by inflation? The reason for that is that
we need to keep government rates current. If we do not put in an inflation increase on public
sector charges, then all that happens is that 20 years from now you find that you are charging 50p
445 for a passport and the passport is costing the Government £30, and therefore we are having to
subsidise a passport by £29.50. Those numbers are not right, but actually it is the sort of thing that
is happening. We are subsidising a lot of public services, which is why we start to have to fund
public services more, which is how you start to fall off the edge on the golden rule, because if
public servants are providing a service to the public which the public pay for, not just through
450 taxation, which is one of the ways that you pay for public services, but also in the thing that they
get, then you start to upset the apple cart. So that is why we put things up. Again, these are very

low amounts. If something costs a pound today, by putting it up by inflation of 2.6%, rounded off to the nearest 50p it is going to cost £1.02 — 2½p, but we will not charge the ½p because we have got rid of the ½p piece – so this is not a huge increase. It is designed to make sure that we do not get shocks, so that we do not have to change fees, as we have had to do in the past when something that in 1976 cost 50p now still costs 50p and we have to change it and say it is going to cost £25. That is why we are doing it in that way, which I do not think in any way dilutes the Minimum Wage increase, or the reduction in taxation by 1%.

Madam Speaker, I hope I have very respectfully gone through the 10 points that I have been given that have concerned people who were outside No. 6 Convent Place. I understand they may have more points that they want to raise with me, and I will take the time either in this place or directly in person to explain the Government's view of why we are taking the measures that we are taking, which are proportionate, which are designed to protect working people and the most vulnerable, and deliver what we have to deliver so that this great entity that is Gibraltar continues to move forward with safe public finances.

Let me now move on to the arguments that we have heard more generally from Members opposite and not just from outside of this House. Of course, their arguments this week have been, all of them, based around the fact that we were going to do a pollution levy that we are not going to do anymore. I fully understand that. The Hon. Mr Clinton is not known for making catchy remarks, but he said this is a car-crash Budget. I asked for it, didn't I, so fair enough. That goes to one measure, but that is the measure that we are not proceeding with.

But what about putting everything in the context not just of that mistake that we made but all of the good things that we have done, whether it is something like going back to the United Nations when hon. Members did not go to the C24 — they made the decision that they did not want to go to the United Nations to defend Gibraltar, although Spain was still going to be there; building every school in Gibraltar new, except for the ones which had already been built by the GSLP and we are making as new with the refurbishments; establishing a Primary Care Centre just for children and a new Primary Care Centre for adults too; putting much more money in the pockets of our public sector workers; upping the Minimum Wage; increasing pensions every year; increasing disability benefits every year, because I will point out to hon. Members later that they did not do that. I genuinely believe, Madam Speaker, that if you pause for a moment and look at what we did in this Budget and you accept that we have come to this in good faith — we made a mistake on the pollution levy, we have put it to one side — the rest of the measures and the rest of our record is actually not bad. It is not perfect, because we are not perfect and we do not pretend to be perfect, but it is not bad. It shows genuine hard work designed to do our best for our people, protect working people and protect the most vulnerable.

When you compare it to their record — and I will go through a lot of it — they gave a loan of £7 million to a developer and lost that money. They overspent in the GHA — which they say now is the most heinous offence — much more than we did; I will go through the numbers. They suggested that the President of the European Union should take over our foreign relations. We think that is a monumental mistake, which shows an error of judgement which goes beyond just the possibility of taxing a car.

Madam Speaker, when we get things wrong we listen and we change course, but we never get it wrong on the fundamental issues. People tell us that they want honest politicians and they want politicians who listen. Well, I do not think there could be a better demonstration than what we have done this week: we listen and we change course. I have yet to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi say, 'You know what, on reflection, I was wrong to suggest that the President of the European Union' — today Ms von der Leyen — 'should be responsible for Gibraltar's external relations instead of the United Kingdom. I was wrong about that. I listened, I have heard the arguments and I was wrong about that.' I have never heard him say that. I have heard him talk about everything else, but not address that issue to which he put his name. I get it wrong and fess up. He gets it wrong and does not seem to want to accept when he has got it wrong on something as potentially fundamental as that. Of course, he was saying that with the United Kingdom outside of the

505 European Union, so the President of the European Commission in charge of our external relations, with the UK out of the EU and Spain at the top table – that seems to me like a bigger mistake than the pollution levy.

Madam Speaker, that is what leads me to take the view that when I have gone through these arguments that people protesting outside No. 6 genuinely have concerns about, and have respectfully dealt with them, and I see the things that hon. Members say which are contrary to the things being said by the people who are outside No. 6 – because they are siding with the GFSB, they are siding with the Chamber, who are saying that we put up Minimum Wage too much, and the protesters are saying, ‘You didn’t put the Minimum Wage up enough, you didn’t put public sector salaries up enough, you didn’t put electricity charges up enough,’ ... The Chamber is telling us that we need to pay our way, that the Minimum Wage is too high and that the public sector costs are too high. So, they are siding with both sides. That is what leads me to believe that hon. Members are not political bellwethers. They are not predicting the weather; they are political surfers. They will jump on any wave that is heading towards the shore of No. 6 Convent Place – *any wave*.

The reality that Mr Bossino disclosed during the course of Question Time is that they would attack us, whatever the results. As I will show you in the course of my address, Madam Speaker, when we declared the record surplus of £80 million – which in fact, if we had not given the £30 million to the government companies in that year, would have been a record surplus of £110 million, calculated as Mr Clinton suggests we should calculate everything – they criticised us for a simple reason: because we had a surplus of £80 million. They said, ‘You should not have a surplus of £80 million. You should have given it back to people in more tax cuts, higher salaries etc.’ When we do not have a surplus they say, ‘You have put salaries up too much.’ We have also given £10 million back to people who had overpaid in tax. Of course: it is their money. They did not used to do that; they used to hang on to the money. So, they will criticise us whether we have a surplus or do not have a surplus, whether the surplus is large or small, because it is clear that hon. Members have that philosophy which the Hon. Mr Bossino explained to you: that they are, in effect, in opposition to attack. The problem is when they attack and do not hit the target and they hit Gibraltar rather than just hitting us. I will have a lot to say about how they have hit out at Gibraltar, in effect – internationally, in particular, and our remarkable success in terms of the movement towards self-government – in their efforts to bring back direct rule in the context of the Inquiries Act.

Madam Speaker, one of the issues that I will deal with is also this question of the contributions to the companies, which the Hon. Sir Joe explained in the course of his address and we highlighted in the Government Press Release yesterday. But when I deal with taxation, one of the things I am going to talk to the hon. Members about – in fact, I will do it now – is what I heard the representative of the Gibraltar Tax Association saying. He said actually, when you look at the 15%, which was long-tailed and which is the international standard, that is not going to make us in any way uncompetitive in the European context. The companies that come here now do not look at that. Holding companies do not pay tax because that is a trading tax. When you couple that with the reduction to 25% of personal tax, then even small companies have not yet done the analysis properly, because they will be even better off. They will be able to take a dividend into the hands of the directors or the shareholders, and that will produce a saving in their hands which will mean that the 2.5% increase will not be relevant to them. That is not an analysis that hon. Members did, so I am grateful that a tax professional has done that analysis, because this is a taxation issue and tax professionals are the ones we need to be listening to.

But of course, in burnishing their credentials as representatives of the working class, which they have never been and they never will be, hon. Members said that we should be more progressive in taxation, that we should not have a flat rate of tax of 25%. It makes sense: a flat rate of tax of 25% for somebody earning £150,000 or earning £1 million, and the person earning £30,000 paying 25% would not be progressive. I understand that, but that is not our system; that is their system. In fact, their system brought down the rates that people paid to in the region of

5%, I think. In Gibraltar, if you made £1 million you paid 5% on any income over £1 million, and if you made £40,000 you paid 25% on £40,000. That was their system, which I think they were, rightly, criticising without realising it was their system. What we did was change that system. We put all of the bands at 25%, especially over £500,000. They had a system. The GSD system was that you paid 25% up to £500,000 and then you started to pay less, not more. You paid 18% on income of between £500,000 and £700,000, and then anything beyond £700,000 was taxed at 5%. That was their system. So, when they were outside No. 6 Convent Place, I assume they were saying to people there, 'Yes, we agree with you to an extent because we think the rich should be taxed less and the poor should be taxed more,' because that was their system. What did we do? We changed that system. Now it is 25% across the board. We think that is better. In fact, it was not 25% across the board, it was 27% because when we put it up by 2% we put it up at 2% across the board, and when we brought it down to 26% last year we did not bring the 27% down for the top rate, we kept it at 27%. We only brought it down in an accelerated way for those who were earning less.

570 There is a lot of detail there about the allowance-based system (ABS) and the gross income-based system (GIB) system etc., but we were the ones who changed their system which taxed the poor more than they taxed the rich. I would at least hope that they acknowledge that; in other words, that they say, just like I have done today, 'Fair enough, we got that wrong because we are not infallible.' They have, in effect, done so, in my view. They have, in effect, done that which I said is perfectly understandable in politics when you make a mistake, which is to make a U-turn, because they have said that what they did was wrong. They have said that taxing less at the top and more at the bottom was wrong, but it is what they did. It is a system they introduced. It was their inception of a tax system that taxed less at the top. I welcome that U-turn from hon. Members. That one is huge. Mine was about something we were going to do which we did not do. This is about something that they did, that they subjected every taxpayer in Gibraltar to. In other words, the people on the incomes of over £1 million, of over £500,000, of over £700,000, have got away with paying that lower tax for years because they introduced the system, and now they have changed their minds on it. *Rectificar es de sabios*: to rectify is the wise man's act, I have been told repeatedly this week. I welcome that they have rectified their position in respect of a system of taxation that rewarded the rich more than it rewarded those who needed to pay lower rates.

What I found remarkable was that hon. Members were, during the course of their speeches, some of which I greatly welcome, referring the public to pages of the Estimates Book, which is online – there it is, it is all online – when we are told that we are the least transparent, most secretive Government ever, and yet hon. Members during their speeches say, 'It is online at page 6 of the Estimates Book; you can see it in line 47.' It demonstrates that quite contrary to what they have said, we are more transparent. The numbers are there; they can be looked at.

This is not an easy exercise. Going through the Government Estimates is not easy. It is not something which I ever did when I was not a Member of this House. Even when I was a Member of this House, if I had not had the tutelage of the Hon. the Father of the House to take me through *a palo*, as they say, to understand the Estimates Book and how it works – the odd *palo* comes even now, believe me ... It is very difficult to understand, but it is there. Just because it is difficult, do not pretend to people it is not there. All of the numbers are in the Estimates Book and they have referred people to the pages of it, demonstrating that that is the case.

600 Madam Speaker, the biggest weakness that I found in the speeches of Members opposite was when they did the analysis of how they say, under Mr Clinton's analysis, that we now have a deficit and not a surplus, because in doing so, one of their speakers was trashing what one of their other speakers talks about being the golden legacy of the GSD. Mr Clinton says, 'If you do this in this way, you do not actually have a surplus, you have a deficit,' and the Hon. Mr Bossino says, 'You inherited a golden legacy from the GSD: you had surplus after surplus.' Well, not if you calculate it according to Mr Clinton, which is the exercise that the Hon. the Father of the House helped us to do: the Clinton deficit. That is to say, if the GSD had taken from the bottom line the amounts

610 that they contributed by way of advance to the government companies actually by way of
payment above the line, as we have been doing until now, they would never have been able to
declare any of their surpluses. They would have been declaring, for those three years, deficits.
We, conversely, would have come in to declare the highest surplus in our history, by far. In other
words, if we did it like the former GSD Government did it, we would not have declared the surplus
of £80 million, we would have declared a surplus of £110 million because we took the £30 million
off above the line. I will come to that and I will show the analysis that the Father of the House did.
615 And yet, I thought that the Father of the House, uncharacteristically, missed a trick because he
only talked about the Clinton deficit, whilst in order to understand Mr Clinton's speech – and I will
analyse it in a few minutes – you have to understand the underlying reality of what he is saying.
Clinton cuts: there have to be Clinton cuts to personnel, there have to be Clinton cuts to salaries
and there have to be Clinton cuts to services, because that is what he is telling us we have to do.

620 So, when I see him outside Convent Place with people who are asking us for more services, for
higher salaries, I am almost minded to say it must be that opposites do attract, because the people
who are in Convent Place are saying the opposite of what Mr Clinton is saying. And believe me,
Madam Speaker, they do not have a common enemy, because we are not the enemy of the
people. We are not the enemy of those who were outside No. 6. We deeply respect how difficult
625 it is for some people. We do not for one moment trivialise it and we will be working with those
people to ensure that we stretch out the hand of understanding and look at what more we can do
to ameliorate the effects of this difficult time for everyone – and it will not be Clinton cuts, Madam
Speaker, of that I can assure you.

But look at what we have to face. Mr Clinton says Sir Joe calls the Estimates non-binding, as if
630 that were a bad thing. It is in the nature of the terminology of the thing that it has to be non-
binding, otherwise it would not be an estimate. To boot, the first word after 'confidential' is 'draft'.
They are draft estimates because during the course of this debate we could agree to change
things. Hon. Members, you did not ask us to. He has asked us to do one thing which is political,
but he has not said, 'Look, I think this number should change because I think you should calibrate
635 it in another way.' That is why it is draft, that is why it is non-binding, and then when it becomes
the estimate, not draft ... New Members will not know. This is the book that is white. After the
debate, if the Budget passes, the Book is made the law and it will be circulated again – identical –
without the word 'draft'. But it is still an estimate. That is why it is non-binding. It cannot be
binding, other than as an estimate, Madam Speaker.

640 There is no need for hon. Members opposite, led by Mr Clinton, to think that there is something
nefarious by the fact that the Hon. the Father of the House says, with 52 years' experience and a
deeper understanding of this process than any of us, that this process is a non-binding process.
How is it non-binding? For a simple reason: because we do something which the Hon. Mr Clinton
is very keen on, rightly so, which is called the supplementary appropriation, which is where, if
645 something has changed, we come back and save that change with a law. I have published the one
for 2022-23 and I said we will be dealing with it in September. That will deal with the changes for
the financial year 2022-23. The law actually provides for what Sir Joe Bossano has said to be the
case. The law actually provides the mechanism for these Estimates to be non-binding and for us
to come back and make the change that is necessary as a result of higher expenditure or any other
650 change.

But look at the language that the Hon. Mr Clinton deploys. He says that we have 'raided' the
Sinking Fund. When we sit in No. 6 Convent Place and are advised by the professionals in the
Ministry of Finance – and we agree usually these things have to be recorded properly, not just by
email, so there is a printout – I sign, I say I agree, put the date, and all the rest of it, I do not wear
655 a bandana, I do not put a gun on the table and I do not put it to the Financial Secretary's head. I
would not stand much of a chance against him if I did, I dare say; he is the most vehement
protector of our coffers. There is no raid. There is a decision made in the context of what is the
proper administration of the public finances of Gibraltar, made very carefully and very
professionally based on advice and in keeping with the law. We have the Public Finance (Control

660 and Audit) Act. The auditor audits, and if we get it right he says nothing; if we do not get it right
he says a lot. That is the rule. It is not a raid. This is not a money heist. Nobody sings *Bella Ciao* as
we start to arrive in the mornings at Convent Place to work out what we are going to put in the
Budget. The language of saying that we are raiding the Sinking Fund when the Sinking Fund is
665 created for that purpose ... The Sinking Fund is created by a law for the very purpose for which we
took £10 million from it. That is not raiding. That is using it properly and in keeping with the law.
There are two completely different concepts in play but Mr Clinton wants to run the hare of a raid,
and that is less than unfair. That, Madam Speaker —

Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): And they closed
670 it down.

Hon. Chief Minister: Indeed, Madam Speaker, the Father of the House, with his elephantine
memory ... If only he were the nominee for the Democratic Party somewhere else, we would not
have the issues that we might have in the western world. The Sinking Fund was closed by hon.
675 Members. They did not raid it, they raided all of it – to use their terminology – and closed it down.
We reintroduced it for just this purpose.

I come back to what the Hon. Mr Origo said, because we degrade politics when we do this. If
young people are hearing that the Opposition say that the Government has raided a fund, that is
what starts the hares running and people saying, ‘Oh, for goodness’ sake, that sounds like thieving,
680 robbery – they are raiding.’ That degrades politics, and what it does, which is bad, bad, bad, is it
does not poison people against us only – of course, it is designed to poison people against us – it
poisons the well and it poisons against all of us in the long term. It disaffects the public, in
particular young people, so I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman: we need to do this in a
different way.

685 Mr Clinton says the GDP to debt ratio is irrelevant. I tend not to agree, for a simple reason: it
is a measure of our economy that was not introduced by a Chief Minister when Chief Ministers
started doing analysis of our economy at the time of the Father of the House. It was a measure of
our economy introduced when a GSD Chief Minister was doing the measures of our economy.
They decided that giving the GDP to debt ratio was an important part of this debate. We have
690 continued it. Of course, it is not relevant to somebody who has a problem making ends meet, but
none of what we do here is relevant to them except the work that we do to put up Disability
Benefit, public sector pay and the Minimum Wage. All of those things matter, but, in the analysis
of how we can do that and why we do that, they introduced the GDP to debt ratio – but of course,
because it is a figure that works in our favour, they have suddenly decided they do not want it.

695 The same is true of the GDP per capita. It is irrelevant, Mr Clinton says. Well, Madam Speaker,
he is just agreeing with me. I have said, for years in this debate, this figure means very little; it
certainly means very little out there – last year, in particular. In the middle of a cost-of-living crisis
the GDP per capita means nothing. It is based on average incomes multiplied in dollars, divided by
the population, but not on the basis of half your working population coming in every day. I did not
700 introduce the GDP per capita calculation into this debate, neither did Sir Joe Bossano when he
was Minister for Public Finance. It was a GSD Minister for Public Finance who introduced the GDP
per capita ratio. As a result, when you measure how the Gibraltar economy is doing, I am advised
you have to keep the same metrics, so I keep to the metrics that they established as the proper
metrics, even though I agree with him that they are irrelevant. Why does he think that it is
705 irrelevant? For a simple reason, not for any of these reasons that I have given; because it works in
our favour, because it is better in our time than it was under them. The GDP to debt ratio mattered
when they were in government, but it does not matter now because it shows that our Government
did better than theirs on GDP to debt ratio. That is the reality. That is what we are dealing with.
The same is true about the GDP to tax ratio. Joe Bossano never talked about the GDP to tax ratio
710 when he was Chief Minister in this House presenting the Estimates. Sir Peter Caruana did. That is

why we refer to it, to keep that metric. Why don't they like it? Because it is better under us than it was under them. It is that simple, Madam Speaker.

715 Mr Clinton says the reality is that Joe Bossano is no Warren Buffett, because he has created this fund in the Savings Bank. Well, he is a better Warren Buffett than the one we had before, who left us with zero in the Savings Bank. At least we know, to coin a Buffett phrase, that when the tide goes out the Savings Bank will not be caught without its bathing trunks on. Indeed, it will have 76 million, this year 80 million bathing trunks to rely on. That is what Joe Bossano has achieved.

720 Mr Clinton says, 'The fact that we get information about the Savings Bank is not a demonstration that you are transparent: we only get it because I ask for it.' Well, okay, but you ask for it and you get it, which demonstrates the transparency. One of the things we could do is simply say, 'Okay, we will put it on the website every month, because we put it on the website every month. You ask the question, so it goes up on the website every month.' But he is paid almost £40,000 to ask questions. He wants to come and ask questions. Is he saying he is tired of asking the questions? Well, that is his job. His job is to ask the questions and get the answers.

725 The Hon. Mr Clinton then defends the record of the GSD for having used the Savings Bank reserve. He says there is nothing wrong in using the Savings Bank reserve. None of us have said that they did anything wrong in using the Savings Bank reserve. We have not said that it was illegal to use the Savings Bank reserve, (**Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Or agreed.) we have not said that they snaffled the money in the Savings Bank reserve, we have not said that they raided the Savings Bank reserve. We have said they took the Savings Bank reserve, I said very specifically, into the
730 Government General Account – not into anybody's pocket, not for any nefarious purpose, but we still think it was not the right thing to do, because we believe as an article of faith that you should have rainy day funds and this is one of them, in the Savings Bank reserve. The Hon. Mr Clinton is unhappy that we have not used the reserve. Okay, he may be unhappy about that, but if we had
735 used the reserve we would no longer have the reserve and we would be doing what they did, which was legal and is their policy but is not our policy.

Hon. Members will forgive us for pursuing our policy because we got a mandate to pursue our policy. It is not the widest mandate we have ever got – it is not the mandate that Joe Bossano achieved in 1992, it is not the mandate that Fabian Picardo achieved in 2015 or in 2019, but it is a
740 mandate, just like the one that Fabian Picardo achieved in 2011, which led to the one in 2015. Hon. Members need to remind themselves of why we have been elected. We have been elected to do the things that we defended during the course of the general election campaign, and I will demonstrate that we are doing them. That is why we put tax down, just like we said during the course of the general election campaign.

745 The hon. Gentleman said, 'Who advises the Chief Minister on these measures?' Madam Speaker, as I said before, when I get things wrong it is my fault, so I am not going to disclose who advised me in respect of the pollution levy. I will be very clear about the fact that it is my fault but is also true that one would like to ask who advises *them* to say that we are running a regressive tax system that taxes the rich as much as it taxes the poor when we have the opposite system and they had the one that taxed the rich less than the poor.
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When he raises issues about Community Care – and once again, I think what he is trying to do is to make hares run – I want to be very clear that the reserves of Community Care, we are told by the trustees of Community Care, are much higher than those left by the GSD in 2011, and we will always ensure that we work with the trustees of Community Care to ensure that payments will
755 continue as long as we are in government and we will not take steps to close down Community Care, which is what they last said in 2011.

Madam Speaker, when dealing with the issue of the Finance Bill, the Hon. Mr Clinton said the last Finance Bill was in the time of Sir Joshua and we should be doing things by way of a Finance Bill, and was recommending to Nigel Feetham that it should be done in a particular way. This is
760 not an issue where we have an article of faith against it. This is an issue of timings and the Book being done in April, considerations with the Tax Office and other officials taking part later, the need for six weeks of publication of a Bill before you can debate it, etc., we can certify it as urgent.

765 It is not an article of faith. But I thought, Madam – Madam Clinton, I was going to say! Ay! Madam Speaker, Mr Clinton gave it away by referring to Sir Joshua. The fact that the last Finance Bill happened when Sir Joshua was in power shows that the GSLP did not do it when we were in government and we have not done it now in government either, but it also shows that the GSD never did it when they were in government. In other words, the GSD are now saying, ‘What you should be doing ...’ but are unable to point to themselves having done it.

770 Mr Clinton sits alongside the Leader of the Opposition, who was Deputy Chief Minister for four years and a Minister for eight years in a GSD Government, and they never had a Finance Bill, although we heard from the Hon. Mr Azopardi in a moment of remarkable political candour that he was not able to influence any matters of public finance when he was in government. It was quite remarkable because all my Ministers influence public finance matters. *(Interjection)* We meet in respect of the preparation of the Estimates Book etc. I thought that was a remarkable demonstration of how the GSD Governments work, quite remarkable.

775 Madam Speaker, the speeches that I heard from the new hon. Members of this side of the House filled me with hope at the energy, vigour and ability of the new Ministers in the Government since October 2023. I shall say something about that later on as I go through some of the subject areas that hon. Members raised, but it is remarkable to see the strength of ability that there is now on this side of the House joining those of us who have been here since 2011.

780 Of course, the fact that that is obvious was not enough for hon. Members. The Hon. Mr Azopardi wanted to start by talking about not any of the issues that are candescent and important to those who were outside Convent Place who have issues making ends meet. Most of what we were treated to in the context of the Leader of the Opposition’s soporific address to this House sounded more – at least to me – like an interview for the priesthood rather than a speech of a Leader of the Opposition addressing a Parliament on a day when the Chief Minister might have got a battering from anybody else.

785 What they wanted to talk about was the leadership of my party. Hon. Members and Mr Bossino himself also spent more time talking about the leadership of the GSLP and the leadership election in the GSLP than they did doing any analysis of the figures. I do not think Mr Bossino referred to many figures, to tell you the truth.

Hon. D J Bossino: I think I did.

795 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Oh, did you? I must have missed it. It is really quite remarkable, because if they think that Nigel Feetham has declared war – those were his terms – by saying, ‘Happy Father’s Day,’ and, ‘If people want me, I am here to stand for the leadership of the party,’ what did they do to each other in the things that they said about each other during their leadership election at the tail end of last year? There was little left of any of them at the end of it. One thing is a leadership election to come, another thing is a war of attrition between candidates to lead a party: one in one direction, progressive, and the other in the other direction, Christian democratic, and never the twain shall meet. In the United States, where primaries are a common thing to become the presumptive nominee, people say nicer things about each other – and that is cutthroat – than they said about each other during the course of their leadership election campaign. They are riven red raw with divisions on that side. Their divisions led to an editorial in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* about how raw those divisions are in that party. Here, a newly elected Member of the Parliament has said – in my view, as I have interpreted it – ‘I am enjoying this. I am ready to step up if my party wants.’ What is wrong with that to such an extent that in the context of a Budget debate it merits mention? Very simple: stirring the pot. *‘Pim Pam, pelea Pom’*
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810 *(Laughter)* That is what hon. Members have been reduced to. This is the Budget speech of the Leader of the Opposition and of the presumptive Leader of the Opposition, to try to *meter follón* on the government benches. It is really quite remarkable.

Madam Speaker, there are real issues. There are people outside Convent Place who are feeling the pinch, who have serious problems with their economy, who are raising issues that *they* are

815 not raising, which I am addressing in my speech today respectfully. And what are they doing? They
 are talking about the Hunger Games. Does the hon. Gentleman think ... indeed, do any of the hon.
 Gentlemen on that side who addressed this issue – that is to say the Hon. Mr Bossino or the Hon.
 Mr Azopardi – think that anybody on this side of the House is going to be foolish enough to take
 820 their advice on leadership and how to win an election, whether it is a leadership election or a
 general election? Come on. He had to leave his party in 2003 after the arrival of the other
 Mr Feetham. He said he was leaving because – he might want to forget that, no? – he said,
 Feethams were not of GSD stock, as if politics was about a ground-down chicken cube that you
 dissolve in boiling water. For goodness' sake, he left the GSD because Mr Feetham had arrived. I
 hear from a sedentary position the hon. Member saying *como tú*. I have never been in the GSD; I
 825 have never had to leave it. I have just left it in the wilderness, nothing else. (*Interjection*)

Then he started a new party – I suppose that is the only leadership election he did well in, the
 one of the party he formed, so he formed himself as leader. And then he complains that I say he
 is not as good as Mr Feetham and that Mr Feetham was not as good as Mr Caruana. Well,
 Mr Caruana was obviously an outstanding leader of the GSD because he won four general
 830 elections for them; that is empirical, it is objective, it is obvious. Whether we liked him or did not
 like him is irrelevant. We are doing an analysis of the odds: he won four times. He stood six times,
 he won four. The Hon. the Father of the House beat him once and I beat him once. That is not his
 record. He is really – and, again, I am making these arguments but I am not insulting anyone – a
 prize fighter, but he has never won in the ring. He is a cage fighter who gets slaughtered every
 835 time he gets in the cage. He has been knocked out twice and he has lost on points twice: knocked
 out because he stood as a leader of a party and did not even get representation in the House.
 What makes him think he would do better than us in the ring with the Spaniards, the Europeans
 and the Brits?

In 2003 he left because Mr Feetham, he said, was not of the same stock as him for the GSD,
 840 and yet in 2019 they stood together being so ostensibly politically close that it felt like I was
 watching a same-sex couple going up to the altar when they were coming here to sign on. In 2007
 the Hon. Mr Azopardi said that Mr Caruana was finished, he said that Joe Bossano was finished
 and that *he* should become Chief Minister of Gibraltar. Well, they both knocked his block off and
 he did not get elected to this House. In 2011 he said, surprisingly, that Mr Caruana was finished
 845 and I was not good enough. We both knocked his block off and he did not get elected to this
 House. Then he came to me and started to work with me and told me that we had the best
 Government ever, that we were the modern GSD because we were all graduates and we were all
 working so well. Then he came to me and said, 'Given that Peter Montegriffo has not agreed to
 stand as leader of the GSD,' – and he said this publicly, it is no secret – 'I am going to take the
 850 chance now because it is my last chance to become Chief Minister.' In 2019, having become
 leader, he did not become Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I think he led them to one of their greatest
 ever defeats. In 2023, when the Government was facing its fourth successive election, he says,
 tired out of ideas etc., he can talk about the margin as much as he likes but he did not win the
 election.

855 Madam Speaker, the fact is that the person giving advice to Mr Feetham, to Ms Orfila, to
 Ms Arias-Vasquez and to Prof. Cortes was not giving advice to them – in fact, did not give that
 advice to Ms Orfila. I will come back to that. The person giving advice to them can only beat one
 person that we know of, Mr Bossino, because the only person that Keith Azopardi has beaten in
 an electoral competition is Damon Bossino, who is the other person who gets up to give advice to
 860 the putative leadership candidates of the GSLP – the man who has never won a leadership contest.
 Again, I am not insulting anyone, I am just referring to the record. *Está claro, no?*

How on earth does he think he is persuasive when he tells Mr Feetham what to do or Ms Arias-
 Vasquez what to do or how to behave, or that our party cares? Our party is different. We have
 leadership elections, we know what we have to do, we offer ourselves to our Members, we make
 865 the argument, and that is it. We choose, and we carry on. We are not going to require an editorial
 in the *Gibraltar Chronicle* saying settle down and get on with each other, which is what they

needed to have. If we are as out of energy, out of ideas and out of touch, as he says (**A Member:** Dysfunctional.) – and dysfunctional – how on earth did they lose? If we are just lying and creating a mirage, how on earth did they not point that out to the public? If we are lying, which we are not, have they not got the ability to show the public that we are lying? If they are that unpersuasive, let us never put them in the room to negotiate for Gibraltar. That is the reality.

Madam Speaker, if mine is a long goodbye, if I am the political carcass, what is he? He failed in 2007, he failed in 2011, he failed in 2019, he failed in 2023. I am the political carcass fighting for his political life? I have won all of these things. I won in 2011 and in 2015, in 2019 and in 2023, and said I am going. I am not fighting for my political life; I think *he* is the one fighting for his political relevance – that is the reality – saying one thing in this place then going outside Convent Place and saying something else to protestors, just like Mr Clinton. This is not a new political drama that is being played out, the longest leadership campaign in history – that is not true. The longest leadership campaign in history started in 2003 when he said to Peter Caruana, ‘Come on, Peter, it is time to go and for me to take over,’ and Peter Caruana said, ‘Yes, how is your coco? The sooner you go the better,’ and he left. Since then, he has been trying to be Chief Minister of Gibraltar. I am wrong, actually, and the Deputy Chief Minister, by being here, has reminded me that I am wrong. The longest leadership campaign in history started when Joe Garcia Snr, rest in peace, left the leadership of the GNP and Keith Azopardi tried to become leader of the Liberal Party and did not succeed. I had forgotten how far back it goes. If anybody is fighting for his political life, it is not me; at least I made it.

Madam Speaker, I thought it was a little bit unnecessary for hon. Members to refer to Rock Masters when referring to the Hon. Mr Santos, for a number of reasons. We are here to do a serious job and the work that Christian has done with Richard Mor in respect of maintaining Llanito culture is something which is now considered to be highly relevant and important, (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and well done for that work. How dare he suggest that Christian Santos is typecast? Certainly not. As Mr Santos reminded him, he has played many more characters than just Rock Masters; I have the videos at home to show for it.

Mr Bossino, in his characteristically retributive style, said that he would remind Mr Feetham of the fact that he was in the GSD etc. Let’s do some reminding. Let’s remind Mr Bossino not that he was in the National Party with us many years ago; let’s remind him that in December he did not file parliamentary questions because he was having a fit of pique because he had not made leader of the party. A Parliament is called by the Government. Their obligation is to file questions. He throws his toys out of the leadership pram and does not file questions for his constituents in respect of his areas of shadow ministerial responsibility. Is that the sort of person we are supposed to be taking lessons from, that putative leadership candidates of a serious political party like the Socialist Labour Party are going to take lessons from – somebody who gets so angry because they have not chosen him as leader that he does not file questions in Parliament, and we are going to allow him to forget that he failed in his duty? The Hon. Ms Norton did not make it in January in time for the deadline to file questions. I have never failed the parliamentary deadline, but there but for the grace of God go all of us; it could happen to any of us at any time. Fair enough. But to not file, on purpose, to show his political pique showed this community who Damon Bossino is, ready to disregard his responsibility to his constituents because he was angry that he had not beaten Keith in the leadership election. I say Keith, Madam Speaker, because it did not happen here, it happened outside.

I was struck by the fact that when I got up yesterday to talk about these things, having just spent two hours talking about them Mr Bossino started to say it is not relevant. So, they can talk about the leadership of the GSLP during the course of the Appropriation debate, and yet when we get up to reply, talking about the leadership of the GSLP and the GSD, it is not relevant. That shows you the double measure which we have to suffer in the approach of hon. Members.

The Hon. Mr Bossino said that their calculation is that I am going in April 2027. I will write it down. I will make sure that my calculation and their calculation are the same, except of course I am not calculating this, it is really quite different.

920 He talked about the wolves in the GSLP. There are no wolves in the GSLP. We are all lions here on this side: lions in defending Gibraltar, lions in defending our people and lions in defending our record – that is what we have demonstrated and that is why we are back here – and lions in engaging with our people. Apparently I have lost my political mojo. What is it, I am Austin Powers all of a sudden? What is it? Are we wolves or Austin Powers? Which way are they going to take the analogies that they want to make?

925 People are fed up with us and with the Government, he said. Well, it just accentuates the fact that they must not be very good at this thing that we call politics, if people are so fed up with us and they did not beat us in the General Election, to such an extent that they do an analysis that says my speech was short and anodyne, not like before when apparently my speeches were too long and boring. So what is it? Do they want me to speak short and sharp or do they want me to speak long?

Hon. D J Bossino: You are never boring.

935 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Isn't there a very clear and obvious reality, which is that there is a pre-election Budget and there is a post-election Budget? That is a political reality. Or is it that hon. Members are going to pretend not to understand that?

940 I was struck by the fact that the hon. Gentleman said that they are learning to match our levels of toxicity. What did I say in my short and anodyne speech which was toxic? A speech which is anodyne cannot be toxic. But hon. Members have fessed up – again, this is Mr Bossino's ability sometimes to see beyond the horizon, because in saying the phrase that he said he has demonstrated that what they are up to is toxicity, just like he gave away in a moment with you, Madam Speaker, during Question Time, that they were going to attack and this was all about, now, as he said, toxicity.

945 He said those who do not want to go back in history will say it is wrong for us talk about the last time they were in government. He talked about when the Father of the House was in opposition, how Joe Bossano had used the dockyard to put pressure on Joshua Hassan in a relentless way. Well, he is forgetting his history. The battle for parity was one in which we were all united. The Government was not with the unions, but everybody now says that the unions did the right thing and hails them as those who were right, and that is the source of our prosperity. I do not think that Joe Bossano was doing anything wrong, as the Hon. Mr Bossino implied yesterday. When we were talking about the dockyard, he seems to have forgotten this was, later, about more than just parity. It was about stopping the privatisation of the dockyard. Mrs Thatcher, who he prayed in aid, was privatising the Gibraltar dockyard against the views of all the political parties in Gibraltar – Sir Joshua, Peter Isola and Joe Bossano. Or is that we have forgotten that the argument in those election campaigns was whether or not, although nobody wanted the privatisation, we should accept it and work with the UK government – the Hassan position – we should fight it and try to not have privatisation – the Bossano position – or we should try to do a better deal, which was the Isola position, which fell between the cracks? He came here yesterday and in his speech said Joe Bossano was using the unions to become Chief Minister. Oh my God, Madam Speaker, what a failure to understand history, a failure to understand even the history of the past nine months when hon. Members have said that the electorate did not get the full picture. Well, if they did not get the full picture, it was not because we lied to them, but if they say that we lied to them, which we did not, then they did not get the full picture because *they* were not able to show the reality.

960 Or is it, in fact, that what happened during the course of the last general election, which is something that I did not necessarily think was relevant to these Estimates because people want to talk about the things that matter to them, how they are going to get to the end of the week ... I sympathise with those people, I understand those people, because my parents I remember sitting at the kitchen table counting the pennies to get to the end of the week when we were paid here weekly with money in an envelope. I remember those days. That is why I have empathy for

people today. That is what people want us to talk about, not about the last election and why they lost it. In terms of empathy and cost of living, spending and public finance, they were the ones with the candidate who spent £100,000 in one phone bill, who then said it was not true and that she was going to sue. I have tabled the phone bills in this House to demonstrate that we were not misleading the public, they were. If anything was said during the course of the last general election campaign which was untrue, it was the purported defence against that reality. Or this idea that we have somehow more recently elevated their visit to the Governor after the Inquiries Bill to something that it was not, that they were not seeking direct rule or anything like that. It is obvious that they were seeking to prevent or delay consent. For what other reason did they go and see the Governor? The Hon. Mr Azopardi said, 'Because the Governor had seen you and you had shared your views with him, because the Governor said on television that you had shared views with him.' Yes, I had shared views with the Governor. The Constitution requires me to meet with the Governor and tell him what I am doing and I give him my views of what I am doing, and it requires the Governor to share his views with me, so I meet the Governor once a week, at least, if not more often. Strong bonds of friendship have joined me to all of the Governors that I have worked with beyond the professional, and I share views with Governors, but just because of that he also had to go and share views? The Constitution of the United Kingdom and Gibraltar does not work on the basis of the King seeing Rishi Sunak every week and also seeing Keir Starmer every week, when Keir Starmer was Leader of the Opposition. It works on seeing Rishi Sunak every week and Keir Starmer once in a while at a reception, perhaps once in a while for lunch and, today, to make him Prime Minister. Even then, if I had shared views with a Governor about a Bill before the Bill was debated in this House, and I had said so and the Governor had said so, and he wanted to share views with the Governor about that Bill, I would have thought that that was normal *before* the debate in this House, but once you have come to the debate in this House you have shared your views with everyone, including the Governor, because this is the place, the Parliament – the word 'parliament' comes from 'parley': debate, speak, talk – where we share our views. He had shared his views with everyone. Did he go to see David Steel to repeat the things that he had said here? Why? Vice Admiral Sir David Steel had watched the debate on television. He was assiduous in making sure that he knew what was happening in Parliament. There was no need for that. Transparently, what they were trying to do was interfere with consent.

The battle for decolonisation and self-government has been won jointly at every stage. Here, they peeled away from the rest of us. The Hon. Mr Bossino says, 'But the expert, the Hon. Mr Azopardi, has written a book about it, so how can you pretend that he was doing something wrong? Quite the opposite.' No, the book he has written, *Sovereignty and the Stateless Nation*, is the one that reaches the conclusion that Andorra is not joint sovereignty, Madam Speaker. Let's leave it at that, because for somebody in this day and age to say we are supported by truth and veracity ... This is back to the days of the Crusades where only they tell the truth, back to the days of St Peter's chair, back to the good old GSD days, the days when, when a Government makes a mistake, when a Chief Minister makes a mistake, he does not say, 'I am sorry, I made a mistake, I will change course,' he doubles down regardless of the damage. Well, those days are gone.

I am always going to be amused by the Hon. Mr Bossino or Mr Azopardi talking about the fact that they are the largest party in this House because the Liberals have two, we have seven and they have eight. They are starting now not just to take the ideological positions of Partido Popular and Vox on issues like abortion etc., they are starting to sound like Partido Popular politicians. It was famously Mr Feijóo who said, doing the investiture ceremony debate in the Spanish Parliament, that he was not President of the Spanish government because he did not want to be, because he is the largest party, just like them.

In that context, going back to the general election campaign – which is what they wanted to do, because that is what they have done in the context of the debate, relitigate the general election campaign which has already been decided – I found it very difficult to understand how he thought he was going to stay on the board whilst surfing at No. 6 Convent Place on the backs of all of those people who were there with genuine concerns, because he was the politician in the

1025 leaders' debate and in his manifesto who had failed to rule out tax rises. There are people saying,
 'We want the Minimum Wage to go up more,' and they are the ones saying the Chamber is right,
 which means that they are saying the Minimum Wage has gone up too much. They are the ones
 saying the Chamber is right – that is to say the public sector is already costing too much, so do not
 put the salaries up. And they are the ones saying tax might have to go up instead of down. They
 are saying the opposite of the things that the protestors at Convent Place were concerned about,
 so what were they doing with the protestors at No. 6 Convent Place? Making common cause about
 1030 an alleged enemy in me or my Government, I assume. Those protestors do not have an enemy in
 us, they have a listening ear and we will be reaching out to them and hopefully working with them
 to continue to ameliorate the cost-of-living crisis on the public.

1035 Madam Speaker, I do not see anybody flying around my political carcass, because I do not see
 a political carcass. I know *que me he quedado en el chasis*, as the saying goes in Spanish when one
 loses a lot of weight, but a chassis does not a carcass make. Far from it, I feel much more energetic
 as a result of the weight loss, far more energetic.

1040 I do not know if, for the first time, hon. Members actually sought to work together on their
 Budget speeches. We usually see them go out in different directions, but this time, in one
 particular regard, they seem to be quite joined up. Mr Azopardi and Mr Bossino made common
 cause, for once. It was all about attacking potential GSLP leadership candidates, to such an extent
 that Mr Feetham was accused of the heinous offence of meeting constituents and businesses that
 are his responsibility in his ministerial office –

1045 **Hon. N Feetham:** With a jumper! (*Interjection*)

1050 **Hon. Chief Minister:** 'What are you doing meeting so many people, like the normal, ordinary
campechano guy that you are?' I think that this is not about whether or not it is one potential
 leadership candidate in the GSLP or another. They are not looking at that. What came across is
 their concern that whether it is one or the other – or the other or the other, or the other or the
 other, or the other or the other – whoever is the next leader of the GSLP Liberals at the next
 general election is more credible than any of *them* in leadership at the next general election. In a
 jumper or in a suit jacket, that is the reality. That is what they were concerned about. That is why,
 at last, they came together and said, '*aquí hay que atacar*' – 'We have to attack because they are
 doing really quite well. We need to push them into staying in ivory towers and not meeting people.
 1055 They are meeting people. That is a bad thing. That is what we want to do. That is the surfing that
 we want to do.'

1060 Not allowing Mr Feetham to forget the things that he did seems to me to be very lazy politics.
 I do not think Mr Feetham has forgotten the things that he did; he is probably very proud of them.
 As he said at the time of the general election campaign, blood runs thicker than water. He was
 supporting his brother, something which we have all respected when we co-opted him into the
 GSLP executive. Does Mr Bossino think we have forgotten those things when we co-opted him?
 We co-opted him because he explained to us that he was supporting his brother, he explained to
 us his ideology, he explained to us what he wanted to do in ministerial office if he was selected to
 become a Minister; and we selected him not because of some sort of collective amnesia. There is
 1065 no need to remind us of any of that. There is no need for that. There was a demonstration of
 commitment to one's brother. That is what socialism is about: commitment to one's brother. So,
 we will welcome Mr Bossino reminding us of that; it might actually give a fillip to Mr Feetham's
 leadership campaign, if he runs one, because it is a demonstration of loyalty and commitment,
 nothing else.

1070 Then the Hon. Mr Bossino falls into the trap of saying, 'Ah, but because Mr Feetham was in the
 executive of the GSD before 2011, and you, Mr Picardo, have said that Mr Feetham' – the other
 Feetham – 'did dastardly deeds in No. 6 Convent Place, then you are saying that Mr Nigel Feetham
 also did dastardly deeds.' Well, I do not accept that, because one thing is what you do in the
 ministerial office and quite another thing is what we do as a party; it is a different thing. But in

1075 that case, they who were all in the executive of the GSD can no longer pretend that the GSD
Government had nothing to do with them, no? They spend a lot of time saying, 'We were just in
the executive; I was not in the Government,' but now, for Mr Feetham, he has to be stuck with
the actions of the GSD Government whilst the GSD exonerates itself of the actions of the GSD
Government. This is worse than nonsense, Madam Speaker.

1080 Then they turn to the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez and say she is the chosen one but she has no time
because she has such a big portfolio. Well, a big portfolio that, as she told the House, the hon.
Lady had asked for and, as she started her speech by saying, she had spent the general election
campaign saying that she wanted for the reasons that she movingly explained to the House and
during the course of her speech in February at the Mackintosh Hall.

1085 Then they say, in trying to stir it, that the Hon. John Cortes, who was not here, may also harbour
leadership ambitions, and if I have not said that he might be leader then he might be disappointed
because he wants to be leader. I do not have to say that anybody wants to be leader. Our
constitution says if you want to be leader, whenever the post comes up – there does not even
have to be a vacancy, you can perfectly challenge the guy who is there – you put your name
1090 forward. You do not have to be told that you want to do it or not do it. Maybe they will say the
Father of the House will want to do it. Well, there are two gentlemen, younger than the Father of
the House, less obviously cognitively able than the Father of the House, who are vying to become
leaders of the free world in November. So, if the Father of the House wanted to become leader of
the party that he founded, who could say that he would not be an excellent candidate for the job?
1095 He has more cognitive ability than the man who is going to have his finger on the button to blow
up the whole world in the flames that JFK told us we might all be consumed by. But why, in all of
that, didn't he refer to Pat Orfila or Christian Santos? Why? Is that the misogynist element once
again coming through? Or is it the homophobia coming through? Which of the two is it, I ask
myself. In my view, every single one of the GSLP Members of this Parliament would make excellent
1100 leaders of the GSLP, each of them better than me. I would support any of them who became leader
to become the next Chief Minister of Gibraltar above any of *them*, certainly above the two who
have been vying for it, who are well known not to be very good at winning elections or being very
persuasive.

Then, to hear Mr Bossino talk about the little courtesy and etiquette that is extended to them
1105 because I do not tell them when the debate is going to be ... Well look, we had a ding-dong across
the floor of the House. I told them when the debate was going to be shortly after I told Members
of the Cabinet – or, indeed, shortly after I decided *with* Members of the Cabinet when the debate
was going to be. I told them when the reply was going to be hours after I was asked by the Leader
of the Opposition – all of which is movable, not because of us but because of them – because we
1110 talk to each other, we think about what we are going to say, who is going to say what, who is going
to take this, who is going to take that, '*Tu que vas a tardar*', how long are you going to take, but
we do not know how long *they* are going to take. They could have taken as long as they wanted.
Ms Norton ... Ms Sanchez – the reason I say 'Norton' will become apparent in a minute, and I am
sorry. The Hon. Ms Sanchez and the Hon. Mr Sacarello could have spoken for three hours each,
1115 Mr Origo could have spoken for two hours yesterday, and Mr Bossino has treated us to longer
speeches than the one that he did yesterday – always animated, always illogical, always long – so,
we might not have been able to do the reply today.

Madam Speaker, I *fully* empathise with the position put by the Hon. Ms Ladislaus about
1120 childcare. I have childcare issues myself; I have them today as a single parent. I fully understand,
but the parliamentary timetable, which is already much more set out than it ever has been before,
subject to the vicissitudes of Government changing us, is very difficult unless we get to the stage
where we agree – as the Leader of the Opposition and I were almost going to agree with you,
Madam Speaker, at one stage – that we put times on. If we say questions on education or, in the
hon. Lady's example, questions on health will be on the third Wednesday between four and five,
1125 then that is it, but we have to finish by five, not then get caught with – usually not her, Madam
Speaker, with respect – another Member getting up and saying – usually the Hon. Mr Bossino or

1130 Mr Clinton – ‘I want to go into this in more detail, in more detail, in more detail and in more detail,’
and then we start talking about the Savings Bank and having all the same arguments we have
always had, again. Then, which it is their right to do, we are here until 8.30 with only eight
questions done, when we arrived at four, and we are not curtailing their ability to ask
supplementaries. It is a simple choice. I am up for it, Madam Speaker. I am up for putting times
and for trying to work it out. The Leader of the Opposition knows that and we discussed that
possibility. I was trying to see how it played out to try and get the times.

1135 We did not know when a House was going to be called or *if* a House was going to be called,
when any debate was going to be had. The first thing the Father of the House said to me when he
was Leader of the Opposition and we got the Appropriation Act 2004-05 was, ‘You need to read
this, you need to be ready. We do not know when the debate will be. He could call it at any time.’
Sir Peter *might* sometimes tell us when he was going to take the debate. So, the idea that we are
not somehow courteous and dealing with hon. Members with etiquette I think is a failure to
1140 understand the mechanics of Parliament as they are today, which I agree we need to fix and make
better, and a failure to demonstrate how they acted.

The most remarkable thing when the Hon. Mr Azopardi got into the substance of his speech –
the bit that felt like a long, long homily on a wet Sunday morning in a church – was this question
of the overspend in the GHA. Once again, he was making the point that the overspend in the GHA
1145 was our responsibility, and this time he broke it down. He said it is not the responsibility of the
estimator who might get the estimate wrong, it is not the responsibility of the clerk who is doing
the work, it is not the responsibility of the person who is making the payments; it is the
responsibility of the Minister. Well, I think we can all agree, for once. It is the responsibility of the
Minister. That is why we say we come here to defend politically the overspends and the numbers.
1150 It is remarkable that he should say that, for two reasons. First of all, they are the ones who talk
about a Public Accounts Committee and wanting to bring civil servants here, to make them
responsible for the overspends and cross-examine them, which is what happens in the select
committee. They want to humiliate civil servants, asking them about every single penny, which is
what happens in select committees. You just have to see how the Permanent Under Secretary of
1155 the Foreign Office was dealt with in the context of the withdrawal from Kabul to see what it is like
when you go to a select committee to be quizzed as a civil servant about your areas of
responsibility, in particular when it comes to money. That is what they want. We say no, it is a
ministerial responsibility. Well, Mr Azopardi seems to agree with us. It is ministerial responsibility,
okay?

1160 His speech this year was a carbon copy of his speech from last year, the mirage speech that he
gave last year. Didn’t he hear the answer? I told him last year how the GSD overspends had been
higher in Health in their time than in our time. I set it all out in detail. GHA expenditure under the
GSD went from £22.4 million in 1997-98 to £87.245 million in 2011-12. Sir Joe Bossano could not
resist and got up and said – well did not get up, said from a sedentary position – they boasted it
1165 was a good thing. Then I took him through each of the increases and, not just the increases in the
Budget, the overspend each year in the Budget. I showed him the overspends in the Budget in the
years that he was Minister for Health. They were higher then than they were last year, and they
were higher then than they are this year. He overspent by more than the hon. Lady has overspent,
if she has overspent, but by his analysis because it is her ministerial responsibility. Well, look, if it
1170 is her ministerial responsibility and she has overspent by less than when it was his ministerial
responsibility, who is a better custodian of the public finances in relation to health? Her. Us. We.

Madam Speaker, it is all set out. I am not going to do what he did, which is to read into this
year’s *Hansard* last year’s *Hansard* as a proposition to prove that I am right. In other words, he did
that thing which we lawyers call the ‘Denning trick’ of going back to something you said in another
1175 case, even though it was *obiter*, that is to say it is not what helps you decide the case, even though
it was not in the majority, and quote yourself as your proposition. He quoted his speech of last
year without quoting my reply which demonstrated that everything that he had said was wrong.
The Hon. Mr Azopardi, as Minister for Health, overspent his budget by more, in percentage terms,

1180 than any GSLP Minister for Health has overspent their budget, in particular in respect of sponsored
 patients and in particular in respect of the capital expenditure of the GHA. I must say, Madam
 Speaker, this is a particularly well-argued part of my debate last year. I would love to read it out
 to you, but I think you have better things to do, and I am sure that you will catch up on that old
Hansard during your summer reading in order to have confirmed that whether it is on the GPMS
 budget, the capital budget, the overall budget of the GHA or the sponsored patients budget, the
 1185 Ministers – because they say it is Ministers – who have the biggest responsibility for the highest
 overspends are GSD Ministers. Well, if it is bad when it happens in our time and they did it worse,
 they must be worse stewards of that budget, that is to say of that part of the administration of
 the public finances of Gibraltar that we are talking about right now.

And then, in the context of that, he says, ‘That is why you have to change Ministers.’ Oh yes,
 1190 because the only way to deal with the GHA budget is to change Ministers. Well, that is the
 consequence (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) – the hon. Gentleman says he did not say that –
 of what he said. He does not think through the things that he says. If it is the responsibility of the
 Minister, then the Minister is the problem – except that he was, in that analysis, a bigger problem.
 We have changed Ministers for Health in Gibraltar since we have had a Health Authority many
 1195 times. I think apart from one year when John Cortes, in the first year, was Minister for Health, no
 Minister for Health has ever brought the Health Authority in on budget because it is demand led
 and because things change. We must work to deliver it on budget. His analysis is painfully shallow.
 When he says then that we failed in our promise to halve debt, he is comparing a 2011 apple with
 a 2023 pear, despite the fact that the anvil of £500 million of COVID debt fell in between. We get
 1200 debt at £517 million, we get it down to about £300 million or £400 million, we are getting it down,
 and then COVID comes and it goes up. Of course we are, today, not where we wanted to be. We
 did not want COVID and we did not want the COVID debt, but we all agreed we should take it.
 That is the reality.

In all of this context, the hon. Member was outside Convent Place on Monday despite saying
 1205 he is going to raise taxes, despite saying that he is going to keep the cost of the public sector
 down – that is to say, not put up public sector salaries – despite saying, from Mr Clinton’s or the
 other Mr Feetham’s mouth, that the public sector was bloated, the Civil Service was bloated. And
 yet they are there. At the same time as the people are crying out for more in terms of the public
 sector pay rise, he is saying, ‘The pay rise that you gave last year, the support payment that you
 1210 gave the public sector, was just an electoral-driven payment.’ He is saying we should not have
 given it. How on earth is he associating himself with people who say that we should have given
 more? He is saying it was an electoral bung when we are saying it was needed by people at that
 time in that way and the unions agreed.

I do not accept that we have told any tall tales, whether it is about being 99% there with the
 1215 treaty or anything else. To say that we are telling tall tales, to say that we are misleading – and he
 is confirming that that is what he said – is to say that we have lied. We have never lied to the
 people of Gibraltar. We will never lie to the people of Gibraltar. We consider our obligation to tell
 the people of Gibraltar the truth to be an obligation which is sacrosanct. We have *never* failed that
 test. In politics it is very easy to talk in a way that is pejorative, but we take this very seriously. But
 1220 now people know we were certainly telling the truth when we said that one of their candidates
 had incurred a £100,000 debt to Gibtelecom in one phone bill. They said it was not true, but it
 was, so if anybody failed the test of truth during the last general election, it is now demonstrated
 that it was them, not us. I do not want to do a postmortem of the last general election here,
 because we won it and there is no need for it. There is no bitterness on our part; it is all on theirs.

1225 We do not preside over a secretive Government, we do not lie, and there is no festering swamp
 of conflicts. What there is, is a clear demonstration of our commitment to transparency: in the
 Book, in this process, in the fact that everything is online, and in the inquiry. It is that clear.
 Everything has been put in the public domain, except where something does not exist because
 where something does not exist you cannot publish it and you cannot give it, because it does not
 1230 exist.

I have found it absolutely remarkable to see the tarnishing of somebody as, in my view, full of integrity and commitment to Gibraltar as Peter Montegriffo, the founder of the GSD, a Deputy Chief Minister of the GSD, a colleague of Mr Azopardi as Ministers between 1996 and 2000 now finding himself tarnished by association with me by the Opposition. They say that because I have appointed him – I took a note of the fact that that is what Mr Bossino said: ‘You have appointed him,’ – he is now tarnished because he is a member, also, of Hassans. It is a little bit tiresome to have to explain to the Hon. Mr Bossino how appointments under the Police Act work. I do not appoint anyone. The Governor appoints after the interview process and recommendation of the specified Appointments Commission. I have nothing to do with the appointment. They check with me if it is okay for the name to go forward. Neither is it a proposal from the current Governor, who does not know Peter Montegriffo, does not know Keith Azopardi and does not know Fabian Picardo and is simply floundering for a name, and I – in a dastardly way, as they suggested in their press release – allow them to put one of my partners from Hassans as the nominee for this job. No, it is done by Sir David Steel, who knows all of the inside-out of the inquiry, Hassans, TSN, Fabian Picardo, Keith Azopardi, Damon Bossino, Joe Bossano and everybody else, and still thinks he is the right candidate. And yet, when they have that pointed out to them they still insist. There would not be a GSD if it were not for Peter Montegriffo. That is the reality. It demonstrates that hon. Members opposite know no bounds when it comes to casting aspersions, and I am grateful that they have demonstrated that in a way that is clear.

As for the *New People*, I have had absolutely nothing to do with the writing of any article in respect of the current Commissioner or the former Commissioner. I have had nothing to do with any writing in the *New People* to do with the inquiry. That will be confirmed to the inquiry. Indeed, because I do not have time, I have not even read those articles. The only politician who has admitted in this House to writing in somebody else’s name was not me, it was the other Mr Feetham, who said that he used to write on Facebook in the name of Mr Michael Bane. I have written in the *New People* many times, but the Hon. Mr Azopardi prays in aid, for some of the propositions that he wants to advance, the *Guardian*. In the *Guardian*, journalists frequently write without a byline – also in the *Financial Times*, sometimes in the *Times* and in the *Economist* – so the fact that in the *New People* articles appear without a byline is as nefarious, improper and wrong as it is in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Financial Times* and the *Economist*.

I have written in the *New People*, Madam Speaker. I wrote a very good series in the *New People* called ‘Peter the Python’. It was so good that the editor of the *New People* kindly each year extracted what I wrote and gave it to me as an annual. In 2001 it was particularly good. One of the articles that I wrote – then anonymously because in a GSD Gibraltar if you put your name to something you were prone to finding yourself in a very difficult situation – was an article entitled Planet of the Tapes. Planet of the Tapes, based on *Planet of the Apes*, was about an episode in our history when the hon. Gentleman was Deputy Chief Minister – and, therefore, on the basis of Mr Bossino’s analysis, certainly part of the Government that did what I am about to refer to now – had provided to them a recording of the private telephone conversations of the then Leader of the Opposition, which they published.

Sometimes it is important that you be able to express a view without putting your name to it. I have not done so in relation to any article to do with the McGrail Inquiry or the current Commissioner of Police in the *New People* – I will take an oath in that respect, if I have to – but I have written in the past not in my name. Of course, I am not the only politician in Gibraltar to have done that. The *New People* is not the only party political publication there has been. There was one called *The Gibraltarian*. In *The Gibraltarian* there was a grossly antisemitic article which once appeared called ‘The Lamentations or Contradictions of Joseph’. I have a very good idea of who wrote that quite disgusting article which on any other occasion would have resulted in a successful libel action in the way that it characterised the Hon. Dr Garcia. I think that person is sitting in this House and I think that person was in the GSD then.

Madam Speaker, nobody on this side is bitter or angry. The hon. Gentleman is talking about the mote in his own eye. What concerns me is that having been a political failure for so long,

1285 having failed to win an election in 2007, in 2011, in 2019 and in 2023, the hon. Gentleman's
desperation now knows no bounds, and even if damage is done to Gibraltar, which is what we
have seen in the way that they dealt with the issue of the Inquiries Act, they will continue to
pursue any aspect of their campaign that they think will enable them to succeed. Therefore, the
only entity drowning in its own contradictions is the party opposite under hon. Members, because
1290 on the one hand they talk about joining with the Chamber and the GFSB in their analysis, and on
the other hand they try to make common cause with those who think the Minimum Wage should
go up. On the one hand they talk about putting tax up, and then they go and protest with those
who think that tax should have come down by more. That is the morass of contradictions that we
are dealing with. That is why hon. Members will never gain leverage with people who have a
genuine problem, who are reaching out to the Government.

1295 The one thing they cannot do is pretend that they are the ones who would never put up water
and electricity, because water and electricity had never gone up for 30 years until they put it up.
The GSD put it up, and if Mr Feetham is fixed by being in the executive or with the actions of the
GSD Government, then Mr Bossino is fixed with the actions of the GSD Government. I do not know
whether Mr Clinton was in the executive at the time. They put up water and electricity, so how
can he stand with people who are complaining about water and electricity going up by 0.004p
1300 when they put it up by a lot more in the years that they put it up? It is remarkable.

Madam Speaker, let's do the analysis. They were the first ones to raise water and electricity
for 30 years. On an average wage of, say, £30,000 you are about £420 better off with the
consolidation of the £1,200 and 2.6% inflation. That is without counting overtime, shift
disturbance and all the other allowances. One per cent less tax is about £300 a year, so £720 better
1305 off. Social Insurance, water and electricity will be a total of about £133, so you are likely to be
about £600 *at least* better off; and there is no way that 0.004% on electricity is going to eat that
up, so we are not giving with one hand and taking with the other. So, the hopeless fiction – which
is what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition used as the theme of his speech – is what the hon.
Gentleman has tried to do. I do not know whether he fed his speech into ChatGPT to try to make
1310 it more relevant, but to repeat last year's speech in almost exactly the same way ... It is a new art
form to come here and quote your speech from last year for this year. And he complains that
Joe Bossano answers the speeches from the year before. At least he answers the speeches of the
year before; he does not read his speech from the year before. In fact, I think the poor man has
given up addressing them on these issues and spoke for less this time because however many
1315 times he explains the economy and public finances of Gibraltar to them they make the same
mistakes every year. At least I only make the same mistake once. 'I am not blaming civil servants,'
he says, 'no, I am blaming the Government.' Yes, I write every cheque. It is remarkable, absolutely
remarkable. At least the Hon. Leader of the Opposition demonstrated to us all why he was not
able to win the last general election against a Government he said was eminently beatable, there
1320 for the taking, and yet he did not make it.

Madam Speaker, I am conscious that I started at 11 o'clock and I have kept you for two and a
half hours. I have a little bit still to go through and I wonder whether this might be a convenient
moment to allow you and the Clerk, who are the only ones who cannot move in and out whilst
the speeches are ongoing – and, dare I say it, me – at least the opportunity for a short comfort
1325 break, and then we should come back in 15 minutes, at quarter to two.

Madam Speaker: We will recess for 15 minutes until quarter to two.

The House recessed at 1.30 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 1.45 p.m.

**Appropriation Bill 2024 —
Second Reading —
Debate continued**

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

1330 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, thank you I am heartened to see that the King has asked Mr Starmer to form a Government. He is now outside the stairs of Downing Street explaining to the British people the Agenda that he brings to the United Kingdom.

I was just finishing off with the contribution from the Hon. Mr Azopardi. I do recall that he said during the course of his intervention that I am somehow seeking the shroud of the protection of the GSD. The religious analogy is not lost on me by somehow working with Peter Montegriffo and with Sir Peter Caruana. Madam Speaker far from it, the Hon. Gentleman knows that when he was not a shroud because he was not in the GSD he was out of the PDP, the Party that he formed and was not able to lead to Government that I actually asked him to represent the Government too although he had been a political opponent. He represented us in the context of the other enquiry, the Hernandez enquiry and he represented us in preparing a blueprint on Constitutional reform as well. Indeed, we were in negotiations for him to become Solicitor General although we could not agree with the fee that he was proposing. So I do not seek shrouds Madam Speaker, I regard people as professionals despite our political differences and that is how I work with people and hon. Members know that I am good at working with people even if I have a political disagreement. I find it more difficult, of course Madam Speaker, to work with someone if they start by telling me that my work, as the Hon. Mr Clinton did, has been written to deceive. That is a suggestion which I think skirts the rules but those are a matter for you not for me, that the contribution I gave in my Second Reading presentation of the Estimates Bill, the Appropriation Bill, is somehow misleading the House which it is not. It is actually quite unfair and quite untrue because the Estimates are not prepared by Ministers.

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To come back to this lazy chestnut that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition came up with, the Estimates are prepared by officials in each Department, who submit them to the Ministry for Finance, who work with them by challenging them in order to get to those right numbers, and then I present them. So, Madam Speaker, I think it is very unfair to say that somehow anything that was said here in the context of the Second Reading by me is written to deceive.

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The hon. Member then talked about a pseudo-socialist Chief Minister. This is an important point and it is a particularly important point right now as a knight of the realm stands on the steps of Downing Street to become Prime Minister, leading probably the most successful socialist party in the world, the Labour Party of the United Kingdom. Socialists do not have to be poor. Socialists do not have to be underachieving. The Hon. Father of the House, when he conceived of the graduate scheme, the scheme where every Gibraltarian would be funded to go away to university, did not say, 'And when you come back from university with a law degree you are not permitted to continuing membership of the Socialist Party because you will then be successful. You might, perish the thought, become a professional who earns considerable amounts of money through your hard work and endeavour, and we the Socialist Party will no longer want anything to do with you because you cannot be a socialist if you do well.' Quite the opposite is the case. What we bank on is people working hard, taking the opportunities, doing well and providing for their families, and in that way not having to rely on the state. This socialist Chief Minister does not rely on the state for the things that he can do for himself and for his family, but this Chief Minister is very proud to be a socialist, regardless of the car I might drive, the profession I may have had the honour of discharging when I was not Chief Minister and the work that may have led me to that to be able to purchase my own home and a vehicle. I will not succumb to the trap of the right wing that only they can be successful and only they can drink alcohol that happens to have bubbles. It is an utter nonsense. It is ideologically foolish to suggest that because a person is successful they can no longer wear the red rosette.

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There is no 'pseudo' element to my socialism or my leadership of the party or indeed my leadership of the community, but there must be a pseudo element to his and his party's attempt, and the Hon. Mr Clinton's attempt, to suggest that they somehow represent working people, because – and I do not tire of making the analysis – you cannot say that you associate with working people who are complaining about the effects of the Budget when you are saying you would have put their tax up potentially by more, and when you are saying that the Chamber is right when the Chamber is saying that the Minimum Wage has gone up by too much and they want the Minimum Wage put up more. That is to be pseudo-representative of the working classes. That is to try to pull the wool over people's eyes, pretend that you represent them and not represent them. There is no shame in representing that point of view. If they believe that the Chamber is right, that the Minimum Wage is too high, that the public sector salaries are too high, they should say so. There is a niche for that in politics. Christian democracy would very adequately describe what most of them think. Conservatism, that is fine, there is no crime in being a conservative – we have had a conservative Government very successfully for 14 years – but they should say so. They should not pretend – and this is the thing that gets me about Conservatives in most places – they should not pretend to represent working people; they should proudly represent the entrepreneurs who want lower tax, lower Minimum Wage, lower public sector salaries. They should do it. They should say that is what we are doing.

We believe that we represent those people too, because we believe those people believe in a fair representation of the wealth of the community, but they spend their time trying to jump into our shoes and pretend that they are the socialists, that they are the representatives of the working class, not us. We happen to be successful representatives of the working class. I do not say that they are not working people. In modern life today we are all workers. In the fact of Gibraltar as it was, they were all the children of working parents just like I am, but they chose a different ideology. They chose the ideology of the right wing. They kissed goodbye to who they were. They have decided to represent what they wanted to become. That is fine, but just do not pretend that we are not who we are. Some of them come from families of entrepreneurs. That is something to be proud of, that is good, but do not pretend that you are something else, because frankly it is so shallow as to be worthy of description as a political sandbank and it makes no logical ideological sense to say that we are pseudo-socialists just because I have been successful in my professional life.

If anybody asked for a blueprint of what a socialist government would have done in Gibraltar, whoever it might have been led by, if it was doing things in a socialist way it would probably replace all the aging schools, it would probably provide new health facilities, it would probably increase the size of the public sector and it would increase the salaries of public sector workers. It would probably increase the Minimum Wage every year, not just at election time. It would probably increase disability benefits every year, not just at election time. That is exactly what we have done, so in the hon. Member's economic analysis – because he is the one who is doing the shadow public finance brief and he is doing the economic analysis – he should be saying, 'They are too socialist; they are behaving exactly like socialists and that is the problem, and that is why we want you to get rid of them,' not that we are pseudo-socialists, because that pretends that we are saying we are socialists and we are not doing the socialist things. We are doing the socialist things with knobs on, because we have also done the sporting facilities and we have done more affordable homes than any Government has ever done. These are the things that define us as socialists. This idea that we have somehow failed our ideology because we are successful is just nonsense. They can make these false hares run against me and then people might believe that I have villas in Portugal, which apparently is one of the things that I have and demonstrates how corrupt I am. It may demonstrate that it is true that this false *Forbes* article that says that I am worth £60 million, which people circulate to each other – (**A Member:** Sixty million?) yes, I know, £60 million, *ya ves tu, aqui iba estar yo!* (*Laughter and interjections*) – is somehow true, but, as I said before and hesitate to say it again, I can afford the Porsche because it is £160 a month; I

would not be able to afford it otherwise. We make these hares run and they denigrate all of us and poison the well for all of us.

1430 The classical thing to do, what they should be doing, is attacking me as a classic socialist – too
 much investment, which is what they really say. When the Hon. Mr Clinton says, ‘I cannot see
 where you are spending the money,’ he is not talking about the Estimates Book, he is not saying
 he cannot find it there; he is saying he is blind. Can’t he see the new schools? Has he not seen the
 Children’s Primary Care Centre? Has he not seen the new Primary Care Centre? Has he not, as the
 1435 Hon. Pat Orfila said, come out of the Kingsway Tunnel – which, by the way, we also had to pay for;
 they commissioned it but we had to pay for it – and seen the magnificent sight that she alludes to
 that will forever remind them, when they come into Gibraltar, of the Socialist Liberal Government
 that I lead, which is Hassan Centenary Terraces? They turn and find themselves at Beach View
 Terraces. They keep going and they get to the new comprehensive schools. That is where the
 money is. It is not in a villa in Portugal, for goodness sake, it is not out of the Estimates Book; it is
 1440 there, in bricks and mortar for the benefit of our people, in particular working people who, if they
 did not have the best schools in Europe provided by the Government, would not be able to afford
 to send their children privately to the best schools in Europe, which is what the rich can do and
 our people cannot. (*Banging on desks*) That is where the money is. It is obvious. The sporting
 facilities cost a fair penny, too. We have an Olympic-size swimming pool halfway up the Rock of
 1445 Gibraltar and a new athletics pitch overlooking a new rugby field, which is now being done by
 football, with a new sporting facility which we are told has one of the best squash facilities in
 Europe. The attack should be, ‘Why are you building the best in Europe? Can’t you build something
 provincial? Isn’t that enough?’ But then the attack would have to be, ‘You are too much of what
 you say you are. You are the real deal. You are the socialists that are putting up the Minimum
 1450 Wage, and we want you to put it up less because that is what the Chamber says and that is who
 we agree with. You are building too many schools; we want you to build less. Let the children
 continue in the decrepit conditions of the comprehensives they were in when we were in
 government. Be less socialist.’ Not ‘Be pseudo socialist’. There is no pseudo-socialism about this.
 This is actually pure, undiluted, modern socialism delivered for our people. Our people say, ‘It is
 1455 not enough, because we are feeling the pinch. Times are hard.’ That is the dilemma for the
 socialist, because the socialist must never fall into the trap of making the books unbalanced and
 giving more when there is not more to give. We have to hold back, to make sure that we build up
 the kitty again to be able to give more in the future, even if we suffer more now, so that our
 children have more in the future. That is the reality. But there is no pseudo-socialism, far from it:
 1460 pure, unadulterated, textbook socialism, and that is what they do not like.

In the time that they were in government they made no investment in the comprehensive
 schools. As I have said to this House before, I knew I had to invest in the comprehensive schools
 because I stepped into Bayside and it was identical to the day when I had left 30 years before,
 with my name still on the board as head boy. (*Interjection*) Of course I was head boy. (*Interjections*)
 1465 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Bossino still shows the bitterness that he had with the fact that he
 was not the one appointed head boy 30 years ago, (*Banging on desks*) but people do not care
 about that; people care about the fact that they cannot make ends meet. They do not want to talk
 about whether Mr Bossino or I was head boy. I am giving the analogy that the school had not
 changed and we had to invest it, and he wants to talk about who was head boy. That is what they
 1470 want to talk about. (*Interjections*)

Madam Speaker: Order.

Hon. D J Bossino: He mentioned it.

1475

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if it helps, I too believe that he would have won that
 election if he had fought it, and when we were in Mount Alvernia I will tell him he would have
 won the 2011 election if he had been the leader, if he likes, but what matters today to people is

1480 that they cannot make ends meet despite the investment in new schools, despite the investment
in new sporting facilities, everything that we have done. Despite putting up the Minimum Wage
every year and the pension every year and putting all of these things up, people still cannot make
ends meet. That is the dilemma for the Government and that is what is driving people to the
streets. That relates to inflation primarily, which is not something the Government can control.
1485 One of the things that people say to me is, 'But why don't you control inflation?' Well, because
inflation in Gibraltar is not actually controllable in Gibraltar. Inflation in Gibraltar comes from the
price of oil, and the price of oil comes from the war in Ukraine and the effect in the United
Kingdom; the two main economies that influence us, Spain and the UK, and inflation there, and
the interest rate. That is why we cannot do more, but we will try to do more. We are listening to
people. We hear what they say and we want to do more.

1490 Their criticism of us is not that we are not doing enough; their criticism of us – if anybody is
discerning enough to read it – is that we are doing too much, that we have invested too much in
our community, in our schools, in our health facilities, in our homes, in our public servants. That
is the reality. That is the wool that they attempt to pull over people's eyes and that is what I will
never tire of showing people, because whoever leads the Socialist Party – I hope always in alliance
1495 with our Liberal colleagues – is a better option for this community than whoever leads the Social
Democratic Party, that is not a socialist party.

Madam Speaker, I am not going to go again through the issue of the contributions to
companies which would have denuded their surpluses if we applied the standard to them that he
has applied to us. We have issued a press release on it. It cannot be explained better than it was
1500 explained by the Father of the House in this place and in the press release. They have countered
it with the same tired arguments. We are very clear. I said in this House we would do it going
forward when we had a surplus; if we do not have a surplus, we do not do it. That is the reality
and that is what they did. Again, if it was right when they did it, why is it wrong when we do it?
This is really having a double measure; a measure that works when they are the ones who are
1505 acting and is bad when we are the ones who are acting. The remarkable thing is that the
Hon. Mr Clinton was hoist by his own petard, because by putting up those pages of the Estimates
Book on Facebook, what he was showing was that we were doing, as the Hon. Father of the House
demonstrated, exactly the same thing which they did, which they say led to the best management
of the public finances, which Mr Bossino said is the golden legacy of the GSD. So, there could be
1510 no better way of saying to hon. Members what you said actually is what we did, and therefore
how can you complain?

On Community Care, it is quite something to hear Mr Clinton say what he says when they were
the ones who gave Community Care £6 million direct from the Social Insurance Fund in the year
that the Father of the House explained his views about how that was actually not the right way to
1515 proceed with supporting that independent charity and its trustees.

I have dealt already with his arguments as to taxation but I do hope he goes back to the drawing
board and does remind himself that it was the GSD that taxed the rich less and that the Socialist
Party – not the pseudo-socialist party, the Socialist Party – with the Liberals changed that so that
those who receive more pay, pay more in tax now. That is an empirical fact. All hon. Members
1520 opposite should familiarise themselves so that they know the reality of what the tax rates were
before and what they are now. The rich paid less under the GSD. The rich paid 18% on anything
over £500,000 whilst everybody else paid 25% under the GSD. Now everybody pays 25%. The rich
paid 5% when it got to over £1 million under the GSD. Now the rich pay 25% when it gets to over
£1 million. It is not fair for them to try to pretend otherwise to the people. It is not fair for them
1525 to pretend that they are not the ones who taxed the rich less.

Madam Speaker, one of the things the hon. Gentleman asked me was, 'Where is the
£10 million that was paid in respect of the *Sullivan* case, that the Care Agency had to pay? It is not
in the Book. Why is it not in the Book? Another demonstration that you have cooked the figures.'
Except that the proposed arrangements were circulated to us on 2nd May. That is to say the
1530 £10 million had to be paid after the financial year and after the closure of the Book, and that is

when the order was made and we were told that we had the obligation to pay it. Therefore, it will be reflected in the outturn when we demonstrate how it has been paid. (*Interjection*) Madam Speaker, from a sedentary position I hear the hon. Gentleman saying words which are more acceptable than the reference to the excrement of the male cow, which is what he was saying
1535 when Sir Joe Bossano was speaking, and I will, therefore, remind him that we will see whether we have a surplus next year, or not. We were estimating a surplus of £3.3 million before we knew we had to make the payment of the £10 million, but as he knows, every year it is likely that we will exceed the income, and therefore it is very likely that even despite the £10 million being amortising in respect of the effect of income, we will still end up with a surplus, which is what we
1540 believe.

But let's do the exercise of looking at the things the hon. Gentleman says in reality. One of the things that his test leads to, one of the things that he would do if suddenly he had become Minister for Public Finance ... Obviously they thought they were almost there because that is why they were saying they would not rule out tax increases. That is why it is obvious that they would have come for people's allowances, they would have come for people's overtime; they would have cut overtime and allowances, they would have cut public sector pay – or they would have cut the size of the public sector, because the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is sitting next to a Shadow Minister for Public Finance who is saying that the Civil Service and the public sector is bloated. It is there in *Hansard* for all to see. If they have said that and they say that there is an
1545 issue with the public finances, what they must be telling us ... Again, let's lift the lid so everyone on the street knows, the people who are outside No. 6 Convent Place and everybody else, that what they stand for is not a greater amount of public sector pay rise; they stand for cutting the cost of the public sector. That is the reality.

Madam Speaker, it is quite remarkable to hear the Hon. Mr Bossino talking about courtesy and etiquette, in particular parliamentary etiquette, when I have already explained that they have more information from us than we ever got from them about timetables, when I explained that the point he was taking was a very bad one because the person sitting next to him had been told within hours of asking when the reply was going to be. But he gets up and says, 'The Hon. the Chief Minister is in the twilight months of this administration. He is a lame duck and this is a
1555 weakened Government. There is no political fire left in their respective bellies.' Well, nobody agrees with him, or at least not enough people agree with him, because it is exactly the same thing that he said in the last Budget and more people decided that we were not lame ducks, that we were not out of energy, that we were not weak and that we were not in our twilight years, and they gave us four more. That is the reality. More people agreed with them this time than last time
1560 but not enough people agreed with them, so he will excuse me for reminding him of the point that we won. We won the General Election; they did not win the General Election.

Frankly, in those circumstances I found it really quite remarkable to hear that the hon. Gentleman felt a point worth making was that I was not here to listen to John Cortes, whom I had told I was not going to be able to be here, and in fact I told the House I would not be here, for the very good reason that I had one of my children's sports days. As a parent, with the same problem, even though I am the Leader of the House and could have said, 'Well, let's sit through it,' instead I spoke to the Minister. Because we share the ideas, I knew what he was going to say: he was going to report to the Cabinet on the work that we do together. That is why I was not here. It is not as if they have been here all the time. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has not been
1570 here all the time; he does not have to be. The only person who has to be here all of the time is me, at least to listen to all speeches of Opposition Members. As a courtesy, although I may disagree with what they are saying and sometimes may not like what they are saying, I have to reply to them and it would be grossly unfair, lacking in courtesy and lacking in etiquette if I replied to somebody not having heard what they have said – although that is what they do to me. They
1575 answer my Budget address as if they had not heard by Budget address. It is quite remarkable. So we will not take any lessons on etiquette from them, Madam Speaker.
1580

1585 Then the question of Sir Joe Bossano's letter to the newspaper came up. The hon. Gentleman said there is such a difference of position between the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano and the Deputy Chief Minister etc. There is absolutely no difference of position between the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano and the Deputy Chief Minister, or indeed the Leader of the House. We are all of the same mind. We express it in the same way sometimes and in slightly different ways, but we express the same sentiment. What good does it do Gibraltar for the Hon. Mr Bossino to get up and say the Spanish might have in the room somebody slightly softer than Joe Bossano, who is slightly harder? Does that help us in the negotiation? Does he think that is helpful? Of course it is not helpful, but he does not care. But it is also not true, Madam Speaker. That the Father of the House wrote a letter in his personal terms replying to something that had mentioned him and setting out his view about his eyelids does not mean that all our eyelids have not also been surgically removed, because we do not blink on this side of the table. We do not blink at all, okay? So, there is absolutely no difference between us.

1595 A theme that both of them have developed is that the GSLP is deeply unpopular. Seriously? We had a general election nine months ago, and it was not the GSLP that lost it.

1600 A web of companies that is dangerous? They have been going on about the web of companies since 1995. When they get the chance to come into government, they add companies to the web, although when they are in government it becomes the corporate structure of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and when we are in government it is a jungle of companies. You could not get a more 'do as I say and not as I do' opposition than this.

1605 'Why did the Government not hold the McGrail Inquiry before the election? Because then we would have won,' they said. 'Why did you not publish the Principal Auditor's report before the election? Because then we would have won,' they said. I am not able to tell the Chairman of the Inquiry when to sit, and there are so many lawyers that getting their diaries together was a difficult thing, so they set a particular timetable and a particular date. I did not set it, and I did not set the date of the election to be before or after the McGrail Inquiry, because the McGrail Inquiry was beyond the end of the lifetime of the last Parliament. I got the Principal Auditor's report 24 hours before I sent it to the Parliament to be laid, so I did not sit on the Principal Auditor's report for one minute. If it is true that they would have won a general election against the GSLP led by me in coalition with our Liberal partners led by the Deputy Chief Minister if it had been held after the McGrail Inquiry, then they were unlucky, and if they would have won it after the Principal Auditor's report they were equally unlucky because they came after. I suppose any opposition in the world could point to things happening after they have lost an election and say, 'If that had happened before, I might have won.' I suppose it is the comfort of fools to do that.

1615 Then they say that I did not have an oven-ready treaty agreement; I did not have it 99% of the way there, as I said. The road to cavalry is easier than the road to this treaty. It sometimes appears that things are agreed and then they are not, and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and things are agreed which are agreed and then they are not, but perhaps nobody should be surprised given the negotiating partners that we have here. It is perhaps normal that at five minutes to midnight they try again and they push again. What people have is a Government that sticks to its position whether it is five minutes to midnight or just before the signature, or not, even if we cannot do the agreement, because the pressure is, 'Now you have said you are going to do the agreement, if you do not concede on this then you do not do the agreement ...' well, that is why we do not set a time horizon for the agreement. But we were almost there and then the tide came out a bit, and then the tide is coming in again. The question is can we get it right, not can we just do it for the sake of doing it, because we will not do it just for the sake of doing it. The Hon. Sir Joe Bossano will not blink and neither will the Hon. Nigel Feetham or the Hon. Pat Orfila, or the Hon. Gemma Arias-Vasquez, or the Hon. Christian Santos, or the Hon. John Cortes, or the Hon. Leslie Bruzon, or the Hon. Joseph Garcia, or Fabian Picardo. We do not do blink.

1630 Frankly, I thought that he was less than generous when he said that the Knightsfield contract does nothing which is value for money. He said there is no value. Has he forgotten that the value was fixed, the thing which he says has no value? The value was fixed by Mr Reyes when he was a

1635 Minister. Has he forgotten that? This is a contract, by the way, led by people who have got
 Gibraltar into a Netflix series and on the front page of the *New York Times* and the front page of
National Geographic, and it does nothing for tourism in Gibraltar? This is not an argument worthy
 of a putative leader of our community. He says he wants to be leader of the GSD and he says he
 wants the GSD to be the Government. That means he must want to be the Chief Minister of
 Gibraltar. How can he say that the people who have got us on the front page of the *New York*
 1640 *Times* and the *National Geographic* and have got us a Netflix series which is obviously attracting
 interest in Gibraltar, who enabled us to have a world heritage site, who have discovered the first
 etching by a Neanderthal – probably the first human etching in history, which is probably our most
 priceless asset – bring no value? He has chosen the worst possible example.

1645 His speech yesterday was probably the speech I have heard in the context of this debate which
 was the lightest on policy. It was all about personalities; the personalities here in respect of the
 leadership and the personalities of those running contracts. He just never seems to hit the
 bullseye. Whether it is us that he is shooting at or whether it is the Hon. Mr Azopardi that he is
 shooting at in the context of a leadership campaign, he never seems to be able to shoot his dart
 to hit the bullseye. It is remarkable. But no doubt if there had been an election in 1988 for head
 1650 boy of Bayside Comprehensive, he would have won. I have no doubt of that: he would have bought
 every vote with bubble gum and Chupa Chups.

He uses the Thatcher adage that socialists always run out of other people's money. That is why
 they should call me a socialist, not a pseudo-socialist. If they are going to rely on Thatcher and her
 analogy that socialists always run out of people's money, they should say you are a socialist, not
 1655 you are a pseudo-socialist. Socialists always run out of other people's money: he says that to the
 Government that has delivered the highest revenue in the history of Gibraltar consistently. In
 other words, there are not fewer people paying into government coffers lower amounts; there
 are more people paying more amounts into government coffers and government coffers are filling
 more. Because we are socialists we are spending, but we do not run out of people's money,
 1660 because we follow the golden rule. In that context, how can he say that he looks after the interests
 of the working class? Nobody in the working class would believe that. Look at what we have done
 on the Minimum Wage: up every year. Look under them. He was in the executive; he is responsible
 for it, he is fixed with it. Just like he says Nigel Feetham is fixed with the sins of Daniel Feetham
 for being in the executive in 2011, *he* was in the executive in 2011. They did not put up the
 1665 Minimum Wage in most years. They put up the Minimum Wage only in election year. How is he
 looking after the interests of the working class? How is he saying that the working class should be
 looked after if he says that the Civil Service is bloated? If they are against the pay rise in the public
 sector ... An AA is going to see their salary go up 5.4%, an AO 5.3%, an EO 4.6% and an HEO 3.25%.
 They are against this because they say the cost of the public sector is too high.

1670 Really, when he says that the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is pursuing her leadership ambitions by
 replying to the Leader of the Opposition and to Mr Clinton, you can see that the man will just
 throw mud for the sake of it – mud, as *they* see it. The Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez did not do what he
 did – in other words, she did not go on a tour of hon. Members opposite and reply to them as if
 she were presenting the Bill, as he did, as if he were the Leader of the Opposition – she replied on
 1675 her portfolios. Mr Azopardi, in his speech replying to me, talked about Health issues and Health
 spending and she replied, and Mr Clinton, in replying to the Hon. Sir Joe Bossano, talked about
 Health spending and she replied on Health spending. That is the reality.

We are very proud of the fact that there is a benefactor who trusts us so much that they want
 to provide for the Community Mental Health Team's new facility. We are not going to say that this
 1680 benefactor is not going to be disclosed, but the benefactor wants to choose the moment when
 they disclose their contribution in the way that they consider appropriate, and we support that.
 No doubt he will be there to have his picture taken when we open it, because he is there to have
 his picture *every* time. The only thing that the hon. Gentleman takes pride in not being seen at is
 Pride. The only Saturday that he cannot make it down to Main Street in time is Pride weekend. I
 1685 am thinking of collecting him in the Porsche and taking him down to Casemates so that we can go

down together, so that I make sure he does not miss it. He is going to run out of excuses sooner or later. He is going to have to stick his colours to the mast again because the GSD is involved in an exercise of saying, through some of the leadership, 'Whilst I am in control of the leadership, the GSD will be progressive,' and then others in the leadership are saying, 'I accept progress

1690 insofar as it has happened already, but you could not pull me to more progress whatever you do; except, of course, there are some things that we might have to undo, like abortion.' That is the reality of what we are dealing with, people who pretend to be progressives, who voted against abortion in this House. That is the reality, Madam Speaker. Anyway, I look forward to him being there to have his picture taken when we open the new CMHT, although I have no doubt that I

1695 would not be able to drag him to Casemates, to Pride, despite the engine capacity of the vehicle we have just discussed.

The fact that the whole of his tourism strategy seems to be to go to FITUR belies where he thinks our centre of gravity perhaps should be. We do not think our centre of tourism strategy should be Spain. Lots of people go to Spain who also come to Gibraltar; that is great, it is part of

1700 what we need to do – we need to get people from the Costa to come here – but we do not think that we need to go to FITUR. He constantly says that we need to go to FITUR every year. Can I just say to him, Madam Speaker, that we will take it as read next year that he wants us to go to FITUR; he does not have to tell us. At least it will save us five seconds of his address and then I will not have to reply, so it will save us three minutes of mine. We have been doing it since he has been

1705 elected to this House, 'y darle con FITUR, y darle con FITUR.' It is as if tourism started and ended at FITUR.

And then, the nonsense that he came up with that we had now had a Damascene conversion in respect of the Air Terminal. The hon. Gentleman had said, 'We have an Air Terminal where passengers come and get on planes and it is really useful because that is how they arrive when

1710 they come on planes.' He said, 'At last, you have noted the value of the Air Terminal, which was a GSD investment.' Madam Speaker, that is not what we said. We said at the time, 'The Air Terminal is a waste of money if you spend it before you are spending money on a new mental health facility, which we sorely need. You should not be doing that to comply with an agreement with Spain to put the Airport on the Frontier line, which Spain may not comply with.' And behold, Spain did not

1715 comply. Then, it was a £20 million airport terminal. The one thing that hon. Members used to accuse me of in the 2011 General Election campaign was of going everywhere with the *Gibraltar Chronicle* that had the headline 'Caruana commits to £20 million Air Terminal' when by then, in 2011, the price was already at £60 million. How dare they talk to us about overspends? This is remarkable. On top of that, then Spain did not comply with the agreement and we get elected to

1720 find KGV in a decrepit state and no work done whatsoever in respect of Ocean Views. That is why we took so long to open the Air Terminal, because we concentrated all resources on what matters for the people of Gibraltar, not on agreements with Spain; on making sure that we had the ability to house those who need a mental health facility, which was what they deserved. We do not resilie

1725 from that, although we do have an airport terminal and people there get off planes and get on planes, and that is all we have said about it. That is the reality.

Why is it that the Hon. Mr Santos did not refer to the Future Job Strategy? Because we have 27 people unemployed and the Future Job Strategy continues with the assistance to employers etc. but the success has been to get it from 490-something to the 27 – the average there. So we do not need to harp on about it unless they want to attack it again, in which case we will once

1730 again remind them that what has seen the dramatic reduction in unemployment in Gibraltar is the Future Job Strategy that they were against. Now it is the thing that delivers. More employment is what they were against. That is the reality. If there is a young person here who does not know these arguments, they should go back and read my Budget speeches from 2011 in this debate. It will take you a while but you will realise we were right about that, too. (*Interjection*) It may be

1735 boring, yes, because you would have to read all of the attacks from Members of the Opposition which are then proved to be wrong, but that is the reality.

1740 I was struck by the fact that he pointed at the Hon. Ms Orfila and said, 'She only had me for one art lesson one day.' Well, she had me for a lot more – Mr Santos, Mr Feetham – so obviously there was some magic in the way that Pat Orfila taught that got us all to this side of the House and did not relegate us just to that side of the House. (*Banging on desks*) Congratulations to the many thousands of Gibraltarian men who were taught by her. He wanted to denigrate her. He said, 'She has no control over the housing projects that are ongoing. This is really quite terrible.' He believes how he sees – in my view, Madam Speaker – the role of a woman Minister when he says that. In fact, every Minister for Housing has not had control of the development of affordable housing because affordable housing is a public finance project run by the Chief Technical Officer and the Financial Secretary under the auspices of the Chief Minister from No. 6 Convent Place – every Chief Minister, starting with the first one to develop affordable housing, which was Sir Joe Bossano – so there is nothing for him to say to Pat Orfila in that respect.

1745 Rent and repair: here is the contract. It is already quite advanced and there are already 13 addresses that are likely to come into the scope of it, and we really look forward to it. There is no question of this not being something that is going to develop. Actually, it is definitely going to develop.

1755 **Hon. D J Bossino:** He has not got it.

Hon. Chief Minister: What do you mean I have not got it? I have just given it back to her. I did not –

1760 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, she has not got it.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman says she has not got it. She gave it to me this morning and I said let me have it so that I can make a note to remind the hon. Gentleman of how wrong he was about that too, and now that I have reminded him about how wrong he was about that too – like every material fact that he has sought to rely on – I have given it back to her so that she can remind him of how wrong he has got it in respect of rent and repair in days and months to come.

1770 He obviously did not like that she is such a strong advocate for the issues that she cares about, that she got more than a word in edgeways on television with him. He seems to think that she should have allowed him to have more of a say. Well, Madam Speaker, I do not believe in women who sit meekly and quietly in the corner and I very much welcome that the hon. Lady, on that television programme and in any future one, will put him in his place and make sure that she defends her position as well as she does, (*Banging on desks*) as she would have if he had raised with her the issue of the Development Plan. He complains that we have taken 15 years to commission a new Development Plan when they did not update the Development Plan in 2009 since it had been commissioned in 1991. That is to say 18 years they took to do a new Development Plan – and he was in the executive, so he is stuck with that too, based on the fact that he tried to stick to Nigel the things that Daniel had done. This is why he does not think things through, although I have no doubt he would have won the election to be head boy with Chupa Chups and bubble gum in Bayside in 1988, which I absolutely robbed from him.

1780 Then he talks about the delays of Hassan Centenary Terraces, Bob Peliza and Chatham, how they pointed these things out and they have been pointing them out for years that they were not COVID related. Obviously, enough people did not agree with him, because these were points he was making before the General Election, and we won the General Election, not by a great margin but we won it. There is nothing about margins in the Constitution; it is all about seats in this House.

1785 But what we did not do, and what we have never done, is lend a developer £7 million. For those who are new to this House, the GSD in government, with Mr Bossino in the executive, lent £7 million of taxpayers' money to a developer. The developer lost that money. Barclays Bank also lost an amount of that money because they had lent against it to the developer. Barclays Bank

1790 quotes that issue as one of the reasons why they left Gibraltar. The taxpayer lost £7 million and Gibraltar lost Barclays Bank, and it was not the GSLP Liberals who made that loan. We made a loan to the *Sunborn*, which they described as a rust bucket that would never come to Gibraltar. We lent them £40 million, we got all the money back, we made about £12 million or more of interest. When we lend money we do not lose money. When the GSD lent money they lost the whole of the sum of the taxpayers' money that they had lent: the golden legacy of the GSD. We recently
 1795 had to pay an extra £600,000, only last month – hon. Members must be aware of it because it was their law firm that represented us, Triay Stagnetto Neish in Madrid – £600,000 of a claim by the liquidators of Bruesa against the Government of Gibraltar in respect of their Mid-Harbour estate. Seven million pounds lost on a loan which they did not properly secure – taxpayers' money – and now £600,000 paid in Madrid to finally settle a £60 million claim filed against the Government of
 1800 Gibraltar. They cannot not be aware of it, Madam Speaker. We chose to be represented by Triay Stagnetto Neish, not because we wanted a cloak in any way. That is the reality. That is what the Hon. Mr Bossino described as the golden legacy of the GSD. How true that not all that glitters is gold.

1805 The Hon. Ms Ladislaus is serious and careful, and careful in everything that she does, and in particular in the way that she presents herself in this House. I am very grateful for the way that she conducts herself in the context of her questioning of the Minister for Health and other Members and the way that she presented her address, but of course I have to tell her that she must be careful with whom she chooses as a mentor, because if you choose as a mentor in politics somebody who continually fails in politics, then you need to learn from your mentor's mistakes
 1810 rather than simply be guided by him. I deeply believe that she will be an asset to this House in years to come and that her instincts are better than those who seek to influence her. For that reason, when I see the influence of others in the things that she does I do fear that she is not being true to herself in the way that she is making her presentations, but I believe that she will soon, as she finds her parliamentary feet – and there are many new Members on this side and on the other
 1815 side – be clearer in the way that she sees her portfolios etc. It is normal; this is the beginning, not the end. I think that she will add, to the elegance that she brings to debate and the way that she presents things, her own instinct because I saw that she was the only one of the Opposition MPs to extend congratulations to Ms Arias-Vasquez about her representation of the people of Gibraltar in New York, which I thought was the courteous and proper way to approach it and I think that it
 1820 does her great credit to do so. Her defence of the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition and the fact that he had characterised the hon. Lady's intervention in New York as a photo opportunity, perhaps without realising quite how he was putting his foot in it – (*Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi*) Well, it is how we have read it.

1825 **Hon. Dr K A Azopardi:** You are lying.

Hon. Chief Minister: It is not a lie, it is how we have read it, Madam Speaker.

1830 **Hon. Dr K A Azopardi:** You are lying.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman needs to calm down. The fact that others might see things in a different way, the fact that we may have interpreted what he has said in a particular way, may or may not be to his liking but it is certainly not to lie. The hon. Lady's defence of him rang hollow and it demonstrated that obviously the hon. Lady had hit home with
 1835 the statement that she had made, because no sooner had the hon. Lady made that statement the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was deploying both the Hon. Ms Ladislaus and the Hon. Ms Sanchez to say that that is not what he meant. Well, Madam Speaker, I certainly do hope that it is not what he meant.

1840 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point of order –

Hon. Chief Minister: You have to point out which point of order it is.

Hon. D J Bossino: [*inaudible*] yesterday.

1845 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** On a point – (*Interjection*)

Madam Speaker: All right, I am going to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi. Please – (*Interjection*) Order. I want to hear the Hon. Mr Azopardi. Yes?

1850 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** A point of order. The Hon. the Chief Minister is misleading the House by saying that I made a reference to the hon. Lady's appearance at the United Nations. There is nothing in my speech that refers to the United Nations visit. I would like him to correct the record.

1855 **Madam Speaker:** My understanding is that the Hon. the Chief Minister said that that is how he interpreted – (*Interjection*) Can I just finish my sentence and then – hands can come down – I will allow comment. The Hon. the Chief Minister, to my understanding, said this is how he interpreted what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had said. I will allow the Hon. the Chief Minister to answer that, and then, if necessary, I will rule.

1860 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is not what I have said; I have said it is our view of what the hon. Gentleman has said. We will interpret the views of the hon. Gentleman in the way that we think is appropriate because, whether hon. Members like it or not, they are not the guardians of our interpretation of the things that they say. We have our own minds and we can interpret and read between the lines, but that is the reality of what they said. The Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is not known for having a particularly thin skin – she has been working with me for long enough to have developed a fairly hard crust – and all of us read it in that way. You know what I am prepared to accept, Madam Speaker? That the hon. Gentleman would be cackhanded enough to not even have meant it. But that is how we interpreted it and that means that the interpretation was certainly one of which it was capable, and then he deployed his assets to try to have the whole thing undone. Well, I think the damage is done.

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Madam Speaker: My view on this exchange is that the Hon. Ms Ladislaus read out what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition had said in relation to the comment on the United Nations, so it is in the public ... They have a record of what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has said.

1875 The public can interpret it as they wish and this side of the House can interpret it as they wish. So, we will move on.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

1880 Yes I agree, as I said before, that there are issues about parenting and being in Parliament and timetables that we need to try to fix, but it is not exclusively in the Government's domain because the Government can lose control of its agenda if we simply look at timings being unaffected by questions etc.

1885 The hon. Lady said money makes the world go round but it does not buy good government. I could not agree with the hon. Lady more. That is the reality. Good government is brought by conscience and by hard work. That is what we have delivered, and the public has agreed because they have once again chosen us to become the Government of Gibraltar, less than nine months ago. I remind the hon. Lady that in the run up to that general election, during the period of the two years before, there were a number of demonstrations outside No. 6 Convent Place, sometimes with more people than there were on Monday, and yet we still won the election

1890 because people trusted us more than they trusted them. We can go through a post-mortem of the general election if they like, but it would be a post-mortem because the general election

happened already, and unless they are going to start challenging it in Trumpian style, the reality is that we won and they did not. That is why we are here and they are not; they are there.

1895 Poverty does not mean that some people cannot access healthcare in Gibraltar, however, because we are not in the United States and our system of healthcare means that all those with or without means can access universal healthcare. There may be some things that people want that are only available in the private sector but that does not mean that they cannot access healthcare. They have better access in Gibraltar to a universal system of healthcare free at the point of delivery than people do in the United Kingdom, which is where the model was
1900 established. Indeed, the problem that hon. Members have is that the proposition that she presents clashes directly with the proposition that her mentor and the Shadow Minister for Public Finance to her right present, which is that we are spending too much on health, that it is out of control and it is the Minister's responsibility. It is really absolutely wrong for them to say that.

1905 Then the issue of COVID and the COVID debt is not what gives rise to the problem, she said, it is the mismanagement by Government. Well, I commend the hon. Lady to read – *(Interjection by Hon. Dr K Azopardi)* Madam Speaker, I think the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition is getting so upset that he is finding it difficult to control himself, even from a sedentary position. He should not worry. I will be able to continue – *(Interjection)*

1910 **Madam Speaker:** I did not hear what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition was saying, so carry on, please.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue despite it. Even if there is to be an element of background music from the Leader of the Opposition, I will continue through it
1915 until he calms down.

The £500 million COVID debt was actually acquired together. The last time that we voted together for a Budget was the Emergency Budget of March 2020, which is the Budget where we took the £500 million of debt. They said, 'The fact that we are voting for this Budget should not be taken as a blank cheque; we still hold the views that we hold in relation to debt,' and we said,
1920 'Of course you do, that is no problem,' but the £500 million came from that Budget. That is the reality. So, the hon. Lady I think would benefit from going back to read some of those seminal debates in this House and understand how the £500 million was used for the benefit of all in our community, in particular in relation to health.

For many people the lack of financial resources means that they will not have access to
1925 healthcare: that is not true in our community, Madam Speaker. Everybody has access to healthcare. If you are of means you might also be able to have private healthcare, but our public healthcare here is probably amongst the best in the world. We are not seeing an inefficient use of resources, although there is always space for more efficient use of resources, which is what the Minister was saying. I commend the Minister for inviting the hon. Member opposite, her shadow,
1930 to go and visit the Omnicrom system – **(Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez:** Omnicell.) Omnicell system – because I think that will help everybody's understanding of how it works, it will help the hon. Lady to ask more relevant questions and I think it is an excellent way of proceeding.

We have not changed ambulances since 2011, the hon. Lady said, 'You have just invested lots of money in maintenance'. It is not true. I do not know where she got that from. First of all,
1935 ambulances were a *big* issue in the 2011 General Election campaign. One of my former Ministers got stuck on the road in an ambulance and will forever remember that, and the minute he was elected he made it an issue. One of my current Ministers has also been in an ambulance being conveyed from Gibraltar and has told the whole House how she carries that with her. Emergency ambulances were purchased in 2012. Two transport ambulances were purchased new in 2013 as
1940 well. An emergency ambulance was purchased in 2013, which has since been decommissioned. Two HDU ambulances were purchased in 2013. Those have since been decommissioned. We replaced them in 2017 and in 2018. A rapid response ambulance was purchased in 2019, another rapid response ambulance was purchased in 2023; another emergency ambulance in 2023; a

1945 transport ambulance in 2023. A further HDU ambulance was ordered in October 2023 and two
emergency vehicles were purchased in March 2024. That is 12 ambulances purchased and
delivered in the period that she says we have not purchased new ambulances. I tell the hon. Lady
these are her first faltering steps as a Member of this House. I believe she will take many more
less faltering steps. She will take them better when she checks the work to make sure that nobody
is leading her up the garden path. She cannot have believed, of a Government led by me, that we
1950 would not have bought any ambulances since 2012, especially if she buys into the fact that I am
the Chief Minister that spends most money. She cannot have believed that I spent the most money
on everything and not on ambulances, and that we still have the ambulances from 2011, although
I must say the fact that she identified that we spent money on maintaining ambulances does not
prove the point that she was going to make, because if she says, 'You spent £400,000 on tyres on
1955 ambulances in this period and you could have changed the ambulances' When an ambulance
gets a punctured tyre you do not change the ambulance, you change the tyre, of course.

So, I say to the hon. Lady these issues are not credible and she needs to be on top of the things
that she has been told. She needs, of course, to have an ear to the ground on the things that she
has been told, but the lesson I learnt – and I learnt it much as she is learning this one when I made
1960 the mistake, with the Hon. the Father of the House as my leader – was that when you are told
something, you ask a question which does not put that as a premise. You ask a question about
how many new ambulances have been bought since 2011, you then get the answer and you do
not come to the Budget and assert the contrary, because otherwise you get the response that I
am giving her now. I hope that she will accept that I am doing it in good faith to demonstrate to
1965 her that it is factually incorrect and actually the reality is a different one and the debate should be
about the different. Maybe she wanted to say that we should have bought 24 new ambulances
rather than 12, maybe that is the argument, but it is certainly not that we bought no ambulances
because that is not true, and because it is not true it is not fair. Yes, we rented ambulances for
four weeks because there was an issue with ambulances being able to go to Spain, so we wanted
1970 to make sure that there was no issue and that is why we rented ambulances in this key area.

On the mental health budget, Madam Speaker, frankly the hon. Lady needs to remember
where we were. As I was saying before, hon. Members spent on the Air Terminal instead of on the
new mental health facility. We inherited the old KGV almost as it is now, probably derelict. It was
the most decrepit facility that you can imagine. We have invested *a lot* in that.

1975 The hon. Lady questions who is advising the Government on the complement of mental health
services. Well, the divisional lead for mental health services, who is advising the Minister because
the Minister is not competent to make decisions in relation to matters of mental health, and there
is also a divisional lead who advises on complement. We currently have five psychiatrists, five
psychologists, one counsellor and eight further counsellors in the Care Agency, so how can the
1980 hon. Lady say that we are being forced to cut resources? I do not know whether the hon. Lady is
listening but this is important because it is about the point she made. In fact, with five
psychiatrists, five psychologists, one counsellor in the GHA and eight counsellors in the Care
Agency we are not cutting resources, we are improving resources, because if she cares to look at
the Estimates Book for 2011-12 there was then one consultant clinical psychiatrist, one
1985 psychologist – that is four less – and 0.5 counsellors, that is 8.5 less. So, we are not cutting
resources; we have hugely increased resources in matters related to mental health. Again, on
issues of counsellors, the Minister is being advised by the clinical lead, the departmental lead, so
we are not cutting resources and it does not help the debate to say that we are doing the opposite
of what in fact has happened. In fact, the argument is we are spending too much, which is not
1990 cutting resources, it is adding too many resources, and it would be consistent for them to say, 'Do
you really need five psychiatrists and five psychologists? We think that you can be more efficient
and make those work more,' which would be in keeping with what they are saying about spending
less in Health, which is the opposite of what they now say.

On specialisations, of course we agree there are some things that could never come to
1995 Gibraltar, but there are some things that can and the things that can are the ones that we are

bringing – the Hon. Minister I think explained that very clearly to the Hon. Mr Clinton in her responses – and that is why relief cover is going down.

2000 The hon. Lady then accused the Hon. Minister of ... because she was going to review something, she said ‘Waiting for that review may cause a problem.’ Has she forgotten that she was standing with the party that was promising to do more reviews as part of their manifesto than any of the others in the election campaign? When she said the review is going to be a problem because it is going to delay things, she then went on, a few sentences later, to call for a review of remuneration. So, reviews are bad and then reviews are good and will help morale.

2005 In relation to Justice, Madam Speaker, there are no less officers on the beat; far from it, there are more police resources than ever before. The Commissioner of Police has been very clear in his exchanges with the Government about the need for high-profile police officers. A further 12 police officers started in January 2024. The RGP continues to fulfil its obligations to recruit 10 command and dispatch officers. There are I do not know how many more police officers now than in 2011. The hon. Lady might want to look at the complement of police in 2011 and now. If I allow myself one comment about the McGrail Inquiry, it is that I could not resist saying to my own lawyer when he was examining me, in chief or in re-examination, that yes, we were all committed to the Police but I had invested approximately £10 million more in the Police. So, I think that is clear.

2015 On notes of operational independence for the RGP, the Minister for Justice gave an answer to Question 65/2024 and demonstrated that the question of outstanding warrants has nothing to do with a lack of police resources, far from it.

He dealt also with the issue of counselling at the Prison, because this used to be done independently. The Prison have not been able to replace that.

2020 On juvenile offenders, I think that there can be wide agreement across the floor of the House. The Hon. Minister for Justice is purporting to work across the ministerial divide to ensure that we all work together to do the best for our juvenile offenders. There should be no reason why we do not work across the divide in this House as well, because on this I am sure that we can all be united.

2025 I do not accept from her or from anyone else that Government has no conscience. Of course Government has a conscience, even if as a construct, because it is not an individual, it does not have a mind and therefore it does not have a conscience, but the individuals who make up the Government have a conscience. When she says to us, ‘Check your consciences,’ she does not need to tell us. We check our consciences every single day to make sure that what we are doing is right in every material respect. This is not a question of red sky at night, shepherd’s delight and a false dawn, far from it, because you see, Madam Speaker, every day has better times and worse times, every day has a cloud, but when we talked about a new dawn in 2011 we talked about specific things that we were going to do. Maybe the hon. Lady has not been in this House to hear me before, so perhaps I have to repeat it. One of the things we were going to do, in Health in particular, was IVF. IVF was not permitted under the GSD. Perhaps it might not be in the future under a GSD Government if it is led by those who are less progressive. No IVF. Couples who could have had children were not having children. We ensured not just that we invested in KGV, created the Children’s Primary Care Centre and a new Primary Care Centre; we ensured that one of the things that we did after 11th December 2011 which we had committed ourselves to do, and now we do also in relation to same-sex couples etc, was that we permitted and funded IVF. The new dawn gave rise to the fertilisation that might not have happened in some instances. There are people walking around Main Street who are the product of the new dawn. The new dawn has a name and a surname. The new dawn is no longer even in upper primary school. The new dawn is in upper primary school about to go to comprehensive. Many of those people are the reality of the new dawn of what we ushered in – of the bright sunlight that Sir Keir refers to today – that we brought to this economy in 2011 with the changes that we brought. So, I say to hon. Members opposite by all means hold us to account, by all means, if you like, take the attitude that you attack, but check your conscience when you do because it is a two-way road.

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2050 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Ms Sanchez then started to give an address which I think helped to demonstrate that the best way to ensure that the public see how right they were to return us as Government and her to Opposition and not to ministerial office is to see more of her, and the more she speaks the more they will see that her attributes are not, in my view, suited to ministerial office. She certainly did not agree with the presentation that the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus has made of the new dawn. That was not her view. I am very clear: whenever I replace my phone, as the hon. Gentleman said, my emails do not change. I have an email from the first working day after the new dawn, which says:

From: Atrish Norton

2055 – that is why I put Norton; she will excuse me –

To: Fabian.Picardo@gmail.com

– it is not just the Hon. the Minister for the Environment’s email that I happily give out –

Subject: Re. Congratulations

Hon. D J Bossino: What are you hoping to get from Nigel Feetham?

2060 **Hon. Chief Minister:** A hug, Madam Speaker, which is what I always get from Nigel Feetham, whichever side we are on. Whatever side. (*Interjection*) Picardo.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I hope you watched the video this morning. There will be more of that.

2065 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, politics does not have to get in the way of friendship, like they want it to.

It said this, from Atrish Norton to Fabian Picardo on the morning of Monday, 12th December:

Good morning. I know you asked me to email you a week after the elections but I wanted to congratulate you on your well-deserved victory. It is amazing to see how excited and happy most people are. You have brought a breath of fresh air and sense of hope that was much needed in Gibraltar. I am certain, for one, that you will keep your promises and be a man for the people, Mr Picardo. Congratulations. When you have some time after everything has settled, please let me know when we can discuss what we spoke about before the elections. Well done and congratulations again, Atrish Norton.

2070 Well, we spoke about that, and that is how Atrish Norton became a part of the Future Job Strategy and worked in the Government. So, not everybody thought it was a false dawn, but people change their minds; things happen in life and they change your perspective, of course. There is not just one election in history and after that everything stays the same – of course, but if then Nigel Feetham was there, then she was here.

2075 Madam Speaker, it might be helpful for the Hon. Mr Bossino to understand that that was not the only email I had from Ms Norton because, as I have said, there were things happening in No. 6 Convent Place between June and December 2011 which we think were really quite unfair and much worse than anything that they have even alleged against us. I got this from Atrish, then Norton, on Thursday, 10th November 2011:

Dear Fabian, as I mentioned when we spoke, I had requested to see the Chief Minister back in February.

– then Sir Peter Caruana –

Coincidentally, a few weeks before election time, I was called to his office to inform me that I could have a meeting at 12 today.

– 10th November; the election had already been called, the campaign was on foot –

However, the CM did not take the time to see me. Instead, Minister Feetham did,

– *no tu, el otro* –

for what was more of a party political broadcast than anything else.

2080 – it is 10th November at 19:46. It is atrish.norton@Ladbrokes.co.uk, if it is any help –

Despite their attempts, they have been unable to sway my own or my family's vote. His best advice was that I should return to the United Kingdom to do a PhD in forensics, something which is not exactly related to my studies as it is more of a science-based discipline. Moreover, I could not really put my ideas, views, or opinions across. I thought I would take the time to go as I had been contacted back then, but it seems that they do not have any real interest in helping qualified graduates. Nepotism seems the only way to advance under this Government.

– the GSD –

I thought I would keep you updated. Hope everything is going well and I will hopefully be able to carry on discussing any job prospects when you soon become our new Chief Minister. Kind regards, Atrish Norton.

I try to be courteous and have etiquette, and I try to reply to everything, Madam Speaker. I replied that same day at 23.32:

Dear Atrish, thank you for your email updating me on progress. I guess that the GSD are now trying harder than ever to pretend that they care about people.

– and this is the point, Madam Speaker; I was pointing it out even then –

It is the oldest trick of the GSD book: ignore people for four years and then pretend to care for a month. I am convinced that most people now, like you, will see through this. As long as they do, I will very much look forward to working with you shortly after the election. All the very best, Fabian.

2085 So, I am pretty clear that not everybody saw us as a false dawn. People may change their minds but four successive new dawns suggests that we have done something in that time, at least bought the odd ambulance or two.

2090 The hon. Lady talks about matters relating to disability. Of course, I understand that these are hugely important issues, so let's look at the record of the party that she decided to stand with on disability: no increase in disability benefits by the GSD between 1996 and 2003. That is to say she has stood for election led by a man who was Deputy Chief Minister and Minister in the Governments in our history that least put up disability. For eight years they did not put it up. They put it up in 2003, the year before the election. No increase in 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010, but obviously an increase in 2007 and in 2011 because of the election. That is to play cynically, in our view, with those who rely on any benefit when you put that benefit up early at election time; cynical manipulation.

2095 We have put up the disability benefit every single year since we were elected. It was £304, it is now £485: 60%, or an average of 5% a year. And we have not just increased it; 162 people used to claim it. The hon. Lady will know why, because when we were elected and under the Governments which involved the Hon. the Leader of the GSD, the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Deputy Chief Minister and when he was a Minister, and which involved Mr Bossino and Mr Clinton in the executive at different times, 162 people claimed because you had to be born with a disability at birth to be able to claim. That was creating huge injustice. Now, 539 people claim Disability Benefit because we changed the rule so you could qualify for it. I get that we have some people who are waiting for the assessment to be made, but at least the assessment can be

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made. In their time, the party that she represents with the leader who was a Minister in those Governments, you were either were born with it and assessed with it when you were born or you never qualified for it. I would not have thought that that is a record for her to be proud of in the party that she represents. By the way, the same is true of pensions. The pensions have gone up under us from £398 to £571: 44%. That is how we defend people who need our help, Madam Speaker. We change the rules so that people who are not born with a disability can qualify for disability benefit. That is how we help people. Yes, I get it, there is a backlog, more people who want to qualify, but *they* limited it to 162. If we had not changed the rules, it might be 200 now, but not 539. We change the rules.

2115 Then the hon. Lady says the majority of people accept that the Government's handling of the public finances has been a total car crash. Well, I do not know whether the car crash is an allusion to the thing that we are constantly talking about – the car – in this debate. No problem. *Me lo gané* The car crash bit is funny. I get it, right? But let's be clear, the majority do not think that. The majority think we should stay in charge of the public finances, because that is what they decided in October – slimmer majority, bigger majority but a majority nonetheless.

2120 The Minister for Health is not ignoring the Mental Health Board's report. She is the one who brought it to this House so that it could be debated. She did not just lay it in this House, she actually debated it. She put a motion. She specifically said that training of registered mental health nurses will commence in September 2024. I do not know whether I have demonstrated that she has got so many things wrong already in the first part of my address to her that she might be whispering to the person standing next to me '*Sálvame*', but she needs to get her facts right. She is not an ineffective speaker. She presents things in a way that might be attractive to people watching, but she needs to get the facts right. She needs to make sure that she is basing herself on facts so that then I cannot come back and say, 'You have got it wrong.' We do not need to get it wrong. We can have a disagreement about whether we do more or we do less, but we cannot be having to point out how you have got it wrong, because that is just not a good use of her resources or the public's resources in funding her, Madam Speaker. If they agree that more needs to be done in this area, they will be supporting what the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez is doing, in particular in moving the Community Mental Health facility and in the work that she is doing to make sure that all of the contracts which are in place are contracts that can be looked at, because there already are contracts in Hillside and Bella Vista and the John Mackintosh Wing. There were no contracts for respite services but the tenders issued have been for that and have now been granted, as she will have seen in the press – or she has not read that in the press or she has not understood what the hon. Lady has told her. The GMRB is not ever going to be responsible for care in Gibraltar. That has to be done in a different way, but she will have supported, I assume, and will want to support the fact that the Hon. Minister for Health is now the first ever Minister with responsibility for the quality of care. In the same way as if you care about equality you say, 'My goodness, well done GSLP Liberals for having the first ever Minister for Equality' – Samantha Sacramento, who is no longer here – because you make equality matter,' if you care about the quality of care you will say, 'Well done in appointing a Minister for Quality of Care. I might disagree with things, but at least well done for that.' What the Hon. Mr Origo did, which was to balance his speech by saying some things that we had done right and then saying we could do better, is actually very difficult to answer and I will try to deal with it, but if all you say is that we have done everything wrong it does not quite hit the mark, because we do not do everything wrong. Neither do we do everything right.

2150 Madam Speaker, there is no privatisation going on of the Health Services. They have been saying that for 13 years now. They have been trying to get the unions on side with them on privatisation of the Health Service. Nobody in the Health Service believes it, because it has not happened. I would gently counsel that they need to find other spectres to fly.

2155 The hon. Lady said that meetings with the heads of service in the Care Agency have not occurred. She accused the Minister of not having those meetings. Well, the Hon. Minister for Health has held meetings with the heads of service on the following dates: 12th April 2024, where

2160 they raised concerns just before the board meeting of the Care Agency; 6th May, which was a two-hour meeting requested on 12th April; and 19th June, a consultation meeting with the heads of service and the union. So, wrong again, Madam Speaker. Again, my advice is to ask a question – ‘On what dates has the Minister met ...?’ – and then you will have the answer. Then you might want to come here and say, ‘Have you only met three times with the people in the Care Agency?’ but do not come here to say that meetings have not happened, when they have. A bit more egg on her face with the facts not being right, another objective fact that the hon. Lady is wrong about; 2165 she does not want to do that again. I think the better thing is to be able to come here and tell us what she thinks ideologically we are doing wrong, what we can do better, but not to say things have not happened when they have happened.

On ‘Hampergate’, far from brushing this issue aside – the hon. Lady says the Hon. Minister for Health has brushed this issue aside – the Hon. Ms Arias-Vasquez actually is the person who 2170 brought this to the attention of the Chief Secretary, so instead of brushing it under the carpet she brushed it right up to the Chief Secretary. The hampers were returned on the next working day. She raised the matter at the fortnightly with the Director General, a 197-page report on Hampergate was produced on 21st March 2024 and all recommendations contained in the report were implemented; so, far from covering it up, she has dealt with it and dealt with it properly. The 2175 hon. Lady has not uncovered anything because, as she can see, it was well on the road to being dealt with.

Finally, Madam Speaker, in relation to ASD and ADHD, she will be aware that we are about to publish the neurodevelopment pathway because the Hon. the Minister for Health has shared that with her. She will be aware that we have employed five senior paediatric support workers 2180 specifically to carry out what she is calling out for us to do, which we agree should be done. That is why we are doing it, which is a proactive strategy to address the challenges faced by families with children with ASD and ADHD.

The hon. Lady accused the Hon. Minister for Equality of responding with amusement and trivialising issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. The only amusement stemmed from 2185 the Hon. Minister’s bewilderment that the hon. Member opposite did not grasp the intent of his message and that misunderstanding.

Let’s be very clear, we are doing a huge amount of work in rehabilitation. A lot has changed up there. But I do want to say something, Madam Speaker. I want to mention favourably the work of 2190 a GSD Minister, Hubert Corby, who dedicated a great part of his life to the work of rehabilitation and did a lot in that space; and, before Hubert Corby, Mr Joe Caruana, who, in respect of Camp Emmanuel, also did a lot in that space. We must all continue doing a lot in that space. (*Banging on desks*) There is a new strategy. There is a lot of detail of what is being done in a consultation group, not a working group, which I could give the House but I would invite the hon. Lady to speak to the Minister because she will be disabused of the errors that she made in respect of that area. 2195 Then, next year, perhaps she can come and check what progress there is in the work that is actually being done, rather than suggest that work is not being done.

Madam Speaker, of course we are committed to the issue of the extension of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but this is not easy and it is not easy for one reason in particular. In autumn 2023 we sent a document to the UK for our inclusion and extension 2200 to us, but the UK has been, in effect, what we might call, in European lexicon, infracted – although this is UN – since 2017 because the UK government have been found guilty of systematic violations of the Convention, so it appears that they cannot get us to join the Convention now because they are under the microscope of the UN. They had a hearing on 18th March 2024, by the UN of the United Kingdom. We are, of course, in through the United Kingdom and so the UK cannot extend 2205 the Convention to us at this time, but we fully agree that we have to proceed down that road. The question is when we can proceed down that road because of the UK’s own difficulties. We would certainly agree with Mr Origo that it is paramount that we are proactive and not reactive in this area, as has been the practice in the past. We started being proactive the minute we were elected – and not proactive, as they had been when they were in government – but we hit the

2210 problem that we have hit with the United Kingdom. Despite that, we have already created our one-stop shop for disability-related issues, which I think is working very well, and Jenny Victory is now under the auspices of the Ministry of the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Speaker, I have said a lot about the contribution of Mr Origo, the youngest contributor. He said we do not do enough for our young people – oh, we should do more, right. My advice, if
 2215 he is interested in taking it, is that if you are serious about doing this gig you have to read the *Times* every morning and the *Financial Times* and the *Gibraltar Chronicle*, of course, and *El Pais* before you come out of your house. If he had read the *Times* on the day that he gave his address – not just watched it on television; you have to actually read this stuff, yes? – on the front page was this, one of the lead articles: ‘How does it feel to owe £50,000?’ It recounts the life of every UK
 2220 student, the average UK student. The average UK student now leaves university – a graduate, three years – owing £50,000: £9,000 times three in tuition fees and what it costs to maintain themselves in that period. That is what we do for every young person who goes away to university. We take away the burden of coming back – or staying away – from university with a degree, with £50,000. When you look at the cost of the scholarships, that is obviously the type of amount that
 2225 we are talking about. We are now talking about also doing something for those who are involved in the Regiment etc. I invite him to speak to the Hon. Mr Santos about just how much we are doing in respect of the Careers Fair. A lot was said already in his speech, so I do not pretend to present it again, but we are doing a lot. We are actually in the presence of – ‘the presence’, as they sometimes talk about the Monarch – the teacher at Bayside who started the Careers Fair, Pat Orfila. She chose to stand with us on this side of the House for a reason, because she understands the commitment that we have to that, which I hope will give the hon. Gentleman an element of comfort. No doubt she is one of the dastardly people who appointed me as head boy in 1988 rather than permit the man who should have been the incumbent sitting opposite.

Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman dealt with a lot where ... Look, I have a lot of detail to
 2235 reply to him and I will happily give him a handout which contains the responses to the things that he said. None of it is combative, it is just showing some areas where we think he may not have seen some of the issues that were being raised. I am happy to share that with him so that he can factor that into his equation and he can still, nonetheless, hold us to account and tell us that we should do better, because we all want to do better and that is part of the job. But he should not
 2240 for one moment think that we are not alive to depression in the LGBTQ+ community, in particular if they have to read or hear one of the Hon. Mr Bossino’s speeches and what he thinks about that community. Indeed, Madam Speaker, given that both the Minister for Equality and the Shadow Minister for Equality talked about how important the mentorship programme is, I very much look forward to seeing your contribution to the mentorship programme, given the invitation was flung
 2245 across the floor of the House by Rock Masters himself.

We would not, however, subscribe to the hon. Gentleman’s suggestion that our tourism figures look bleak in any particular respect. Air departure tax is up from 2022-23 to 2023-24 by 35%; Upper Rock tourist sites in the same period by 40%, forecast to increase further in the next year
 2250 by 21%. Comparing to pre-COVID levels, we are up in revenue terms by 73% from pre-COVID levels – not COVID levels, pre-COVID levels. Cruise numbers are forecast to be up from 2023 by 12% and in 2025 they are forecast to be up by a further 24%, which will be 18% above 2019 – that is to say 18% above pre-COVID levels; the work of Vijay Daryanani and now Christian Santos. The number of coaches increased from 2023 by 26% and a further 19% next year. These are not bleak numbers.

By the way, in case they are not aware, Madam Speaker, I know that they tell us that we need
 2255 to do more in terms of tourist sites etc., but I do not know whether he is aware that when they were in government not one penny – and I say this hesitantly because when you say not one penny it has to mean not one penny – was invested in the Upper Rock. The taxi drivers and tour operators used to tell us, ‘*No meten un penique.*’ Not one penny was invested in the Upper Rock. We do not
 2260 just invest, we invest a lot of money in the maintenance of the Upper Rock and you can see it is in a better state. The new Skywalk was a new facility. We brought Mark Hamill over to open it. We

2265 were greatly criticised. It is one of the most watched videos ever in relation to Gibraltar, and *Star Wars* nerds like me kill themselves to get up there. The Windsor Suspension Bridge is a second new facility, and now a new facility is coming with the World War II Tunnels that the Hon. Minister has announced. I know that he needs my attention to be able to agree something which has a public finance consequence that is another new reopening of a site. We have invested more there than they ever did – I say ‘they’ meaning the party that he has chosen to sit with in this House, and so he will forgive me for saying thank you for the advice but we are not going to take it from them, because we think we are doing the job. But he is absolutely right to push us to do more.

2270 Madam Speaker, the Hon. Mr Sacarello just does not seem, to me, to get anything right in terms of numbers, and this is a debate about numbers. He is a lovely chap – I do not think anyone has met Mr Sacarello and thought he is anything other than a lovely chap – but we are not here based on whether we are lovely chaps or not; we are here on the basis of whether we will be more, or less, efficient in the management of the resources of this community chaps. It is wrong
2275 to say that tax has not increased year on year. It may not have increased, he says, in real terms or inflationary terms, but when you look at the tax take you have the COVID issue to deal with but it is very clear that we are going in the right direction. The number of companies incorporated in Gibraltar is not the measure of activity in Gibraltar, because most of the companies that might come to get incorporated in Gibraltar actually are just holding companies. What matters is OFT
2280 activity, the value-added companies that come to the insurance sector, the gaming sector, the B2B sector. It might be one company, Entain or Ladbrokes – which is where I got the emails from just after the general election in 2011, from Ms Atrish Norton – but imagine the economic activity that it creates. So, you have to be a little bit more discerning than that. In particular, Members opposite need to realise ... because I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who was talking
2285 about 60,000 companies, the only person who has referred – (*Interjections*) I know that I create much mirth on the benches opposite but this is an important point, in particular for the Hon. Mr Sacarello, so if they would do me the courtesy, if only momentarily, of listening to me, they will be impressed by the mistake that they have made, Madam Speaker. The only person who has referred to 60,000 companies on the Gibraltar Register before was Mr Margallo, and then the
2290 Leader of the Opposition or he referred to them. There are actually 14,000 companies. I think he will find when he looks at *Hansard* – it may have been a slip of the tongue – that he said that: 60,000 companies. That is the Spanish number. It is actually closer to 14,000 companies.

We do not recognise a stalling Brexit negotiation, Madam Speaker. We really do not recognise that. We think there is a Brexit negotiation where we will not blink, and therefore, if they want us
2295 to sign a deal that requires blinking, we do not blink. If they call that stalling, we call that standing our ground. We will not call it stalling. We will take as long as we have to take to do a deal that is a deal that does not cross red lines, or we will not do a deal, but it is not stalling. There is no stalling Brexit negotiation. Delayed because there was an election in Spain, an election in Gibraltar, an election in Europe, an election here? Okay, maybe. We have to go into technical talks, but what
2300 can you do? Are you going to blame me for the calling of the UK general election or for the calling, by effluxion of time, of the European election? How else can you blame us for this stalling Brexit negotiation? And do you really think that it is appropriate to come here and talk to us about things being clouded in a cloak of secrecy? No. It is a negotiation, and therefore the things that are being discussed in the negotiation are inside the negotiation, because if we take them outside we will
2305 put more pressure on ourselves and that will be worse for the negotiation and therefore worse for Gibraltar. That is the point. But if the Hon. Member wants to make those points, that is fine because I can see that they are the tenor of the seriousness of the point he made next, which is that this heightened uncertainty has led to a paralysis of the economy. (*Interjection*) Did he say that he said ‘partial’? Oh, partial, a partial paralysis of the economy. Well, Madam Speaker, with
2310 paralysed limbs, this economy has got bigger than most economies in the world. It has grown, I have told them, by over 6%, it has got to almost £3 billion and has produced the highest revenue in the history of this place even when the economy was going like the clappers, as it would have been, in their interpretation, when they were in government. So, give me partially paralysed under

2315 the GSLP and not going like the clappers under the GSD, because that is the highest revenue in our history.

2320 Where do they get this from? He came here just to tell us, in effect, what he heard at the Federation of Small Businesses, but if that is his position – and look, he comes from an entrepreneurial background – I accept it. He is not coming here pretending to be a socialist. He is coming here saying, ‘I am an entrepreneur.’ Get up and say, ‘The Minimum Wage should not go up; that is what I believe. The Minimum Wage should go up by less and the public sector pay should go up by less.’ That is what he believes. That is what he should tell us and he would be respected for it. He may or may not garner more or fewer votes but this is not just the politics of trying to get votes; this should be the politics of what you stand for, not pseudo-Christian democracy. At least we are not pseudo-socialists. If he is agreeing with the Chamber, or rather, 2325 Madam Speaker, hang on a minute, a partially paralysed economy where nothing gets done, no inward investment, and yet we managed to get a premium for the Eastside ... We got the premium for the Eastside, and Eastside work has now started. They have not just finished the revetment; they have started doing all of the other work. So, in a partially paralysed economy we have actually got the thing that they never managed to get going, going.

2330 Do you want to go faster on the deal? I can tell him something for nothing, because it has been implicit in everything we have said: there was clearly an opportunity to continue and do a deal, of course there was, crossing all of our historic red lines, all of the reasons that his parents and my parents lived in a Gibraltar with a closed Frontier, but we could have done the deal. Would he have done the deal just so that we were not delayed, stalled or partially paralysed? I hope the answer is no, Madam Speaker, because we would not have done the deal. We will not do the deal 2335 until it is the right deal.

2340 When he says that he agrees with the Chamber’s strategy, and they agree with the Chamber and the Federation, what he is saying is that they will get rid of the taxi drivers. We will not get rid of the taxi drivers. The taxi drivers have done a magnificent job. They were our only ambassadors. They are some of the most premium tours offered for Gibraltar. But the Chamber does not like that, and the Chamber, who represent the transporters and the cable car, want the opposite. I will do the opposite, but let’s be clear who he stands with and who he does not stand with. In adopting, as he did, the Chamber’s criticism of the Budget, this is what he is adopting.

2345 There is no question of union involvement having stopped a couple of *enchufes*; far from it, Madam Speaker. None of this takes away from the fact that I think the hon. Gentleman is a lovely fellow but having seen what I have seen and what I am going to go on to analyse, I would not buy the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from him if he knocked on my door, let alone give him my vote so that he could run the public finances of my community. This idea that union involvement has stopped a couple of *enchufes* of jobs for the boys is just them rerunning the 1996 General Election 2350 campaign because it is the one they won. Actually, the Minister has gone back and looked. The attempt to get somebody promoted, which the Minister referred, was actually from one of their boys, a relative of one of their officials who made no secret of the fact that they are one of their officials – because we do not discriminate whether you are GSD or GSLP; if you need help, you need help – who sought elevation outside of the mechanisms for application for filling a particular post. I am not going to reveal it across the floor of the House but I will show him the material, because I am sure the Minister can share it with him, because they will know exactly who it is. The job was for one of their boys, and our boys stopped it because it was not being done through the right procedure. So, this idea that the GSD have to stop the GSLP from doing jobs for the boys is not true. It is nonsense. It is the opposite of the truth, like everything they say. They pretend to 2360 be one thing when, in fact, it is the opposite. I commend the Minister for the way that he acted in this case, which he has been able to refer to me. We do not care which party you belong to. We help you if you are a Gibraltarian. That is it. His speech was really just a collection of clichés, again the sorts of clichés that poison the well for all politicians and all of politics. This is not us sitting around on an evening with a cigar and a whisky talking about clichés; this is Parliament, to come 2365 with facts and figures.

He says they are committed to affordable housing and we have not done enough. Facts and figures. Affordable housing 1988-96 commissioned by the GSLP, 2,442. That is eight years. What about the 16 years from 1996 to 2011-12? Eight hundred and one. Who cares about affordable housing and houses for our people? The 12 years that we have been in government: 2,141 flats commissioned. Those are the facts, old chap.

He then says, 'You say you are going to build 3,000 homes: that is extra sewage.' Well, yes, there will be more Gibraltarians, but really what we are dealing with is moving Gibraltarians. It is the same amount of sewage being moved in different directions. 'But you have to invest in sewerage,' he says, 'Even though it is not visible, this is infrastructure and you must invest in the infrastructure, even though you cannot see it and it is not shiny.' Who is he preaching to? Does he not check the figures? In there, in that room are all of the numbers. It is not that I have the numbers myself; they are here. In fact, these cupboards contain all the old Estimates Books and it is now online. Does he know how much was invested in infrastructure between 1988 and 1996, in particular sewerage infrastructure? No? He hasn't checked? He hasn't gone to the I&D pages of the old Estimates Books to work it out? I will tell him, Madam Speaker: £4 million, eight years, an average of £½ million a year. Eighteen million more was invested in the infrastructure for the reclamation. So, £4 million in the existing infrastructure, new infrastructure £18 million, right – 1988-96, the administration of Joe Bossano. In 1997 to 2011, the administration of the GSD, £3.9 million, an average of £243,000 a year, half of the main amount and nothing compared to the investment in new infrastructure. The Hon. Mr Sacarello is absolutely right, you have to invest in infrastructure even though it is not shiny. We did it and they did half. What about the period from 2012 to 2024? Did he check those numbers before he came to attack me? They are there, in the cupboard behind him. *(Interjection)* They are online as well. All the Estimates Books since 1997 are online – the most transparent and accountable Government in the history of Gibraltar – and they do not even know it is there. Remarkable. I will take it from the silence from a sedentary position, Madam Speaker, which is absolutely the correct parliamentary position to take, that he has not checked before he has opened his mouth to make an accusation that we were not investing, that actually in the period 2012-24 we have invested in infrastructure £36 million, £12 million alone in sewerage infrastructure. So, the Bossano administration £4 million in eight years, the Caruana administration just shy of £4 million in 16 years, the Picardo administration in sewerage £12 million in 12 years, and on general infrastructure £36 million, with £30 million still to spend on the Eastside. We have invested much more than they ever invested. There is an Excel sheet with all of this information, where I have extracted the information for him from the Estimates Book so that he can see the point, so that next time he comes to this House to make a point it is a point worth making, because this is not us sitting around with a whisky and a cigar and saying the first thing that comes to our mind, old chap; it is about the serious matter of the investment of the public finances of Gibraltar, which are the responsibility of the Government because they primarily are the fruits of taxation.

Madam Speaker, in that context, when he talks about no strategy for diversification, there is so much of a strategy for diversification that I do not think anybody in this House wants me to go through it. How can he say that we are borrowing from public borrowing to the detriment and not to the benefit of our children and the tourism product? He said that. He said those words. How can he say that? We have given them every school in Gibraltar new, or refurbished – the only one, St Joseph's, yes? – a Children's Primary Care Centre which did not exist before, a new Skywalk and a new Skybridge, just to address children and tourism product, which he says we are not investing in. How can he say we are not investing in our children and our tourism product and that we have a diminishing asset base? We have an increasing asset base. That is the whole point. When Mr Clinton says, 'You are spending the money and we do not know where it is,' I say, 'There it is, in the assets – the schools, all of the other assets. There it is.' We do not have a diminishing asset base. In fact, does he know that they are the ones who sold the family silver? Or does he not know that instead of borrowing against an asset, they decided to sell assets? They decided to sell all of the post-war stock; that is sell, alienate. They gave away the family silver. If these are the things

he is complaining about, he joined the wrong party. In the same way as he did not do his research before coming here to give his speech, if he had done his research before going into politics he would have joined us and not them if he was genuinely concerned about these things.

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Now is the time to listen to our people, he says. Well, Madam Speaker, we are listening, we always are, but they spoke nine months ago in an orderly and proper manner.

Yes, there are power cuts, but I have a table of power cuts, which can be circulated, which shows that actually there are many fewer power cuts now than there ever were before. Perhaps there will always be power cuts, but there will be less. The record for the year with the fewest power cuts was actually 2016, when we only had one. The record for the year with the most power cuts was in my time, in 2013, when we had 56. Do you know why? Because the power station which I inherited from them blew up. I was having lunch on Easter Sunday, or Good Friday, (**A Member:** Easter Sunday.) and took a call that the power station had blown up. I do not know whether he remembers but we had an almost complete extinction event. I am happy for these to be circulated, if hon. Members want, so they can have the statistics. This is empirical stuff: many fewer power cuts now than in their time, apart from that year when the power station blew up and we were trying to recover from it the year after.

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Madam Speaker, in that context it was almost a pleasure to hear the Hon. Mr Reyes get up and start talking for all of us when he was talking about the unity of the Gibraltarian and how we would not be shifted on the things that really matter for us. He got a magnificent clamour of support from this side of the House because we all believe in what he was saying when he started his speech. Where we cannot agree with him is when he talks about the complement of teachers, because he seems to have forgotten that the complement of teachers in 2011 was 299 and now it is 472.

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On the National Theatre, the reason he did not get much from us on that is because it is very clear it is being done by a private trust, so there are no numbers in these Estimates which deal with that. But, in any event, there will be provision for those who now rely on the smaller theatres. There is a lot of data that I will happily give him, that has been prepared by my colleague. I will just hand it to him so I do not have to keep the House in going through the issues which are deep educational issues that he and the Minister exchange views on, Madam Speaker.

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The thing that I find very difficult from him is his support from the GFA without supporting the GFA. So, yes to the GFA but no to support of the GFA. And yet, I do not know whether he wants to forget but the booklet that he stood for election under in 2015 has them developing the GFA stadium at Victoria – *them* – with taxpayers' money. So, now he says, 'We support the GFA, but no taxpayers' money,' but he stood for election with a programme that said they would fund the GFA stadium. Additionally, there are a number of in-depth responses to the things that he raised about Europa, which I will happily share with him, which the Minister for Sport has given me to respond to him but I do not think I need to keep him by responding to him on my feet.

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Madam Speaker, they have said that they are going to vote against the Bill, and that is their prerogative but it is a real pity because people will only be paid if this Bill passes this House. We have a majority of one, which is enough, but it is a pity that we cannot at least agree to pay salaries and then disagree about everything else. When I was there, I used to say, 'I do not agree with how they are going to spend the money, but' as the Leader of the Opposition had taught me, 'Gibraltar must have an appropriation and therefore we will support the Bill so that the salaries can be paid.'

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I am very sorry that they are not going to do that, because I have no doubt that the mechanisms that we are using in this Estimates Book are exactly the same mechanisms that have been used for generations in respect of public finance in Gibraltar. They used them, we use them and we use them in the same way that they used them. When they use them it is fine and worth supporting and when we use them it is terrible and should be voted against. That is really not a way to run, in our view, the approach to politics and public finances. You cannot love this country just when you win and you cannot care about the public servants of this country and them having the finance that they need just when you win. You have to always care. You cannot just say that company borrowing is okay when you are the Government and that company borrowing is not okay when

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2470 you are the Opposition. It does not wash. You cannot say that company debt is bad when we are in government but fine when you are in government. That is just not serious.

I get it that the hon. Gentleman is setting himself up, every day that passes, in the normal way of any Leader of the Opposition after an election loss – in his case, the fourth the successive general election loss – when you say to the electorate, in the words of ABBA, ‘If you change your mind, I’m the first in line.’ I get it, Madam Speaker, but the election was last year. The public trusted us to return to government, to prudently continue the management of their affairs.

In the presentation of these numbers and these policies on Monday, I made a mistake. We have rescinded that mistake. We are ready to put this public finance Bill to the Parliament so that it enjoys sufficient support that every one of our public servants can have the financing that they need to do their jobs – our teachers, our nurses, our policemen – and it would be a real pity if they only get paid at the end of this month because we vote that they should and hon. Members opposite vote that they should not, which would be the effect of the Bill not passing. The Hon. Mr Bossino has voted four times for this Bill and four times against, not really caring about the consistency that his vote represents. By the time the Hon. Mr Azopardi was elected to this House, Mr Clinton’s infection, in terms of voting against, had already caught in the GSD and all hon. Members who are new will likely be whipped to vote against. Mr Reyes I think has voted four times for in opposition and six times against, or something – who cares, because consistency has never been their forte, but it has always been ours. If we were sitting where they are sitting now, if they were presenting an Appropriation Bill, even though we might disagree with how they might spend the money we would vote for the spending and continue to try to persuade people to put us in charge of the purse strings, which is exactly what we did in October last year. We won that general election with a small margin sufficient to ensure that for the fourth successive term and for the 13th successive year it would be our presentation of this Appropriation Bill that would be the one that would go forward.

2495 For all of those reasons and each of them that I have presented in the time that I spent presenting the Second Reading on Monday and today, rowing back from the measure on the pollution levy, which is now dead and buried and which was a mistake, I nonetheless commend the Bill to the House. *(Banging on desks)*

2500 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to appropriate sums of money to the service of the year ending on the 31st day of March 2025 be read a second time. Those in favour? **(Several Members: Aye).** Those against?

Hon. Chief Minister: Let’s have a division, Madam Speaker.

A division was called for and voting resulted as follows:

FOR

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez
 Hon. J J Bossano
 Hon. L M Bruzon
 Hon. Prof J E Cortes
 Hon. N Feetham
 Hon. J J Garcia
 Hon. P A Orfila
 Hon. F R Picardo
 Hon. C P Santos

AGAINST

Hon. Dr K Azopardi
 Hon. D J Bossino
 Hon. R M Clinton
 Hon. J Ladislaus
 Hon. G Origo
 Hon. E J Reyes
 Hon. C A Sacarello
 Hon. A Sanchez

2505 **Madam Speaker:** Thank you. The question is carried, 9 to 8 in favour of yes.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn until Tuesday at 9.30 in the morning, to take the Committee Stage and Third Reading.

Madam Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye). Those against? Passed. This House will now adjourn to Tuesday at 9.30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 3.45 p.m.



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 9.30 a.m. – 1.25 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 9th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 9.30 a.m.

[**MADAM SPEAKER:** Hon. Judge K Ramagge GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

BILLS

FIRST AND SECOND READING

**A Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes —
First Reading**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Tuesday, 9th July 2024.

(ix) Bills — First and Second Reading.

5 A Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes. The Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

10 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** I have the honour to move that a Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes be read a first time.

Madam Speaker: I now put the question which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes be read a first time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

**Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023 —
Second Reading approved**

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Clerk: Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023.

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that the Bill for the Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023 be read a second time.

20 Madam Speaker, the Bill inserts a new section 27A and B to the Limitation Act to set a limitation period of 20 years, within which proceedings for a recovery order under chapter 2 of part 5 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 or an action for the recovery of property for the purposes of an external order under chapter 2 or part 3 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 (External Request and Orders) Order 2019 must be brought.

25 Clause 4 makes transitional provision to make it clear that the increased limitation period applies to causes of action which accrue before and after the commencement of that section and

that it will not apply to causes of action barred by section 4 of the Limitation Act before the commencement of the amending Act.

30 Clause 5 makes a minor amendment to section 70B of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 to correct a typographical error, which refers to proceedings under chapter 1 of part 5 when the proceedings are in fact under chapter 2; chapter 1 containing the introductory provisions.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Bill to the House.

35 **Madam Speaker:** Before I put the question, does any hon. Member wish to speak on the general principles and merits of the Bill? The Hon. Ms Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, good morning.

40 Whereas, yes, we are completely supportive of the principle and the fact that it has been brought, of course after 20 years we all know that evidence degrades accordingly, and therefore it is a safe amendment to make. It is in line with the UK legislation, but on that specific point, the fact that it is in line with the UK legislation perhaps the Hon. Minister would consider making wider amendments to the legislation.

45 I simply flag this because the UK legislation, as I understand it, which dates back to the 80s, has in fact been criticised for the manner in which it was drafted and therefore I would simply flag that point for the Hon. Minister to have in mind.

Hon. N. Feetham: Duly noted, Madam Speaker. This is the advice which the Government has received in discussions with — apologies.

50 **Madam Speaker:** Sorry. Yes. (*Interjection*) Sorry, you are absolutely right.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I was not sure if the hon. Member had asked my colleague to give way. But on a substantive point, may I raise this, which is 27B of the Bill extends the period — the limitation period, as the Hon. Minister has indicated, in relation to the making of recovery of property for the purpose of an external order, which I assume means orders obtained outside Gibraltar and therefore giving some kind of route to recover property here.

55 Has there been consideration given, because it was not obvious on looking at the Bill, to see the interlinkage between — there may be a situation where here we are extending the limitation period by 20 years in Gibraltar, but in the particular place where the original order was granted, it is not possible to pursue someone after 20 years. Has consideration been given to that?

Madam Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak on the general merits and principles of the Bill? No? In which case I call on the mover to reply.

65 **Hon. N. Feetham:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the comments of the hon. Members opposite. The Government has acted on the advice received. I have not practised criminal law, so therefore the point which is being made by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is not one that I can immediately comment on.

70 However, having said that, we are confident that on the advice that we have received, based on the discussions that we have had with MONEYVAL and related third parties involved in the FATF evaluation process, we are satisfied that the amendments that we are bringing to this House are amendments which are and remain relevant towards the type of cases which the relevant law enforcement agencies in Gibraltar are looking into and indeed prosecuting.

75 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes be read a second time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

**Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023 —
Committee Stage and Third Reading to be taken at this sitting**

Clerk: Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023.

80

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): I beg to give notice that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill to be taken today, if all hon. Members agree.

85

Madam Speaker: Do all hon. Members agree that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill be taken today? (**Members:** Aye.)

**A Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005 —
First reading approved**

Clerk: A Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005. The Hon. the Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry.

90

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): I have the honour to move that a Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005 be read a first time.

95

Madam Speaker: I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005 be read a first time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

**Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023 —
Second Reading approved**

Clerk: Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023.

100

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that the Bill for the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023 be read a second time.

105

The purpose of this Bill is as follows. Gibraltar has extension of various conventions, mostly to do with crime that borrows parts of the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005, ('the Act') where there are provisions in those conventions that relate to mutual assistance and which Gibraltar needs to comply with.

110

Following Gibraltar's departure from the EU, there has been more reliance on this Act for mutual assistance provisions. However, each international agreement, convention or arrangement varies in terms of the mutual assistance it seeks to provide. Some of these will only require standard or basic provision, whilst others require more detailed and sophisticated frameworks with more extensive powers.

115

There are agreements on the horizon that will need to be implemented in legislation if Gibraltar wants to seek extension. One of these is the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters between the UK and the Kingdom of Morocco. It is therefore intended that all these different agreements, where possible, are implemented through secondary legislation, using a regulation-making power in the Act. The current regulation-making power is not wide enough for the purpose, and therefore the Bill seeks to enhance that power, as has been done with other

Acts. The Bill will also assist Gibraltar in complying with any further or future international standards arising from the MONEVYAL assessment process. The work that has been done so far has borne very good results and this work needs to continue.

120 Clauses 1 and 2 contain provisions in relation to the title and entering into force of the Act. Clause 3 of the Bill replaces the current regulation-making power under section 25 of the Act with a wider power which has a dual role. It gives the Minister the power to make subsidiary legislation in order to implement international agreements and arrangements to do with mutual assistance, and through regulations amend the Act for this purpose also.

125 The regulations may contain consequential, supplementary, incidental and transitional provisions as may be appropriate. In addition, the Government are disapplying section 23B of the Interpretation and General Clauses Act.

130 There are many examples of these type of powers in Gibraltar law and to name but a few: section 129G of the Import and Export Act 1986; section 223A of the Merchant Shipping Act; section 118 of the Gibraltar Merchant Shipping (Safety, etc.) Act 1993; section 33 of the Civil Aviation Act 2009, although this has more regulation-making powers than simply for the purposes of international conventions; section 72(10) of the International Criminal Court Act 2007; section 180X of the Public Health Act; section 69(1)(u) of the Transport Act 1998; section 184 and 184ZA, which includes powers to amend the Act by regulation of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015; sections 135 14 and 18 of the Mutual Legal Assistance (Council of Europe) Act 2018; section 18 also includes power to amend the Act; section 30 of the Mutual Legal Assistance (Merida Convention) Act 2023; section 19 of the Trademarks Act; section 14 of the Patents Act; section 16A of the Transitional Organised Crime Act 2006.

140 **Madam Speaker:** Before I put the question, does any hon. Member wish to speak on the general principles and merits of the Bill?

145 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, we have no substantive comments except to support the amendment.

145 **Madam Speaker:** In that case, if no other hon. Member wishes to speak I call upon the mover to reply.

150 **Hon. N. Feetham:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker.

150 **Madam Speaker:** I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005 be read a second time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

**Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023 —
Committee Stage and Third Reading to be taken at this sitting**

155 **Clerk:** Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023.

155 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** I beg to give notice that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill be taken today, if all hon. Members agree.

160 **Madam Speaker:** Do all hon. Members agree that the Committee Stage and Third Reading of the Bill be taken today?

COMMITTEE STAGE AND THIRD READING

Clerk: Committee Stage and Third Reading. The Hon. the Chief Minister.

165 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move that the House should resolve itself into committee to consider the following Bills clause by clause, namely the Appropriation Bill, the Limitation Periods (Amendment) Act 2023 and the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Act 2023.

In Committee of the whole House

**A Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015
and for connected purposes—
Clauses considered and approved**

170

Clerk: A Bill for an Act to amend the Limitation Act and the Proceeds of Crime Act 2015 and for connected purposes. Clauses 1 to 5.

Madam Chair: Clauses 1 to 5 stand part of the Bill.

175

Clerk: The long title.

Madam Chair: The long title stands part of the Bill.

**A Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005 —
Clauses considered and approved**

180

Clerk: A Bill for an Act to amend the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) Act 2005. Clauses 1 to 3.

Madam Chair: Clauses 1 to 3 stand part of the Bill.

185

Clerk: The long title.

Madam Chair: The long title stands part of the Bill.

190

**A Bill for an Act to Appropriate Sums of Money to the service of the
year ending on 31st day of March 2025 —
Clauses considered —
Commenced**

Clerk: A Bill for an Act to Appropriate Sums of Money to the service of the year ending on 31st day of March 2025. Clause 1.

195

Madam Chair: Clause 1 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Clause 2, Head 1, Treasury.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Chair, clause 2(1) as it is laid out in the Bill talks about a sum not exceeding £609,930,000, and then we will go through each head individually. But I just want, at this stage, to flag the total there. That obviously relates back to part 1 of the schedule. I am conscious, Madam Chair, that under section 35 of the Constitution I am not allowed to propose an amendment to the Bill. If I were allowed to, it would be entirely dependent on the Chief Minister's Finance Minister. That is in relation to the £10 million settlement, which we have been told is not included in the appropriation.

If it were to be included — I imagine that it would be on the head 26 when we come to it — it would be on Health and Care, which is a combined new head, which includes the Care Agency, it would have to be increased by £10 million and therefore affecting the total.

I just flag that at this stage because that would affect the total as shown on clause 2(1) and perhaps we will come to that when we come to schedule 26, but I thought I would just flag that at this stage.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I know what the hon. Gentleman says — Madam Chair, I know what the hon. Gentleman says, but I have already told him that this is not going to be reflected in these numbers, and if anything it is something for a supplementary Appropriation Bill. In any event, he has caveated all of the points he has made with 'ifs', because they are entirely hypothetical.

Although I recognise that he is flagging it now, we are not going to agree to any changes to be made to the Bill, because it will be a matter for a supplementary Appropriation and perhaps not dealt with even in the way that he has suggested. It does not have to increase the cost in that way. We have had the debate on the subject. This is the Committee Stage. We need to look at the detail now.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, with the greatest respect to the Chief Minister, as he said last week, these estimates are drafts. The expense has been crystallised, which is the word he is fond of. It is a known expense of the Government. If there is to be given legal cover to this payment of £10 million, which has to be presumably authorised by a controlling officer, that controlling officer needs to have the legal cover of Parliament to make an appropriation payment of £10 million.

We are now sitting at the Committee Stage looking at the detail of the various elements of the appropriation and it is entirely appropriate to raise this matter now. Otherwise we have the rather bizarre situation where Government has admitted to making a payment in May of £10 million, which is not reflected in the estimates for 2024-25. Therefore whoever has made that payment the Government is effectively telling them today in this House that there is no legal cover for that payment and we have the opportunity now to give the legal authority for that payment.

That is what we are here to do, Madam Chair, is to give legal authority for appropriations. I really do not understand the Chief Minister suggesting that this is for something to be done by way of supplementary Appropriation, i.e. an expense that will be occurred after this Appropriation Bill, which is not envisaged, which is what the Constitution talks about.

But this payment has been made, entirely envisaged, it is known, there is no uncertainty about it. There is no 'if' about it. It has been made. Therefore I think at this stage in the Committee it is entirely appropriate to consider to include the payment of £10 million, otherwise, I do not understand what we are doing here, Madam Chair

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government does not believe it is entirely appropriate. We do not believe it is necessary. We do not believe that the hon. Gentleman's legal interpretation is correct. We do not believe it is necessary to give cover in that way. We do not believe that what he is proposing is something that we need to do and therefore we are not going to agree to do it

Clerk: Clause 2, head 1, Treasury; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

250

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, Madam Chair, can I just raise – and can I say at the outset something that I should have said at the beginning of my first intervention to the House, that we are down Mr Saccarello, and that is because he is in COVID recovery; unfortunately he tested positive for COVID over the weekend.

255

Can I just ask, on Other Charges and on Insurance Expenses, which is subhead 10, the forecast outturn there is about £120,000 higher. What does insurance expenses under Treasury cover? Can the hon. Member perhaps explain that to us?

260

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, it is not just obviously No. 6, Convent Place. These are all of the insurance premia charged to the Government. For example, the marine fleet, which relates to the GPA, the vehicle fleet and the vehicles across the Government, property across the Government where we are not self-insuring. So all of the premia across the Government. Business travel insurance. We have got the annual business travel policy, the property protector insurance, the motor vehicle fleet, the marine fleet and the marine vessels insurance. These are all the contracts.

265

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, I have two questions. On payroll, on personal emoluments, (a) salaries; if I can refer Members down to line — the new subhead 4, Support Payments, which was £101,000, which is effectively part 1 of the pay settlement will Unite. And if you look at the estimate for 2024-25 for payroll salaries, given that £101,000 is effectively the effect of that, settlement is the second part of the settlement reflected in the salaries number for 2024-25.

270

My second question is in relation to subhead 2, line 16, Government Offices — Rent and Service Charges, which has gone up. (*Interjection*)

275

Madam Chair: Yes, perhaps we could do one point at a time.

Hon. Chief Minister: No Madam Chair, the support payment is not reflected in personal emoluments, as the hon. Gentleman knows or should know. The pay settlement, so to call it, the public sector pay increases which are referred to in this House, are not referred to — are not reflected in the figures in any year. There is a provision at the end of the Book for covering the increased cost of salaries based on that. I think it is one of the last heads. So that is not reflected in (1)(a).

280

Hon. R M Clinton: I am grateful to the Chief Minister for that answer.

285

Madam Chair, if I can then go to the second question, which is in subhead 2, line 16, Government Offices — Office Rent and Service Charges, which has increased by £1.5 million from the outturn last year. Does the Government have any information in respect of the increase?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker. I think that reflects some upwards increases in some of the rents that we pay, which were reflected in the coming year, or will be reflected in the coming year, and cumulatively amount to that.

290

Hon. R M Clinton: Just to confirm, so that is only rent increases, there are no new rents showing there.

295

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, there is the new rent that I referred the hon. Lady to as well in answer to her question at the earlier part of the session in relation to the Care Agency.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, would the Chief Minister have an analysis of those new rents?

300

Hon. Chief Minister: Not of the new rents, Madam Speaker, not with me. But I answered the question in this session of the House.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, Madam Chair, but that was in relation to one Agency.

305

Madam Chair: Anything else on head 1? Head 1 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 2, No. 6 Convent Place; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

310

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Chair, can I ask on subhead 2 – subhead 15, Other Grants and Donations, forecast outturn, the estimate for last year was £500,000, forecast outturn £1.7 million. Does the hon. Member have to hand a list — a breakdown of that subhead, or would he prefer for me to write to him to ask him for that information?

315

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do have it to hand. It is very, very long. I am very happy, as usual, to say to the hon. Gentleman that I am prepared to give him a copy of the schedule. I am always happy to give it, but I will only give it on the basis of it remaining confidential because if we start to tell one charity what another charity gets, then we will have a charitable competition in terms of how much each gets.

320

But I am very happy for the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to have a copy of the schedule if he writes to me.

325

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I will do so. But can he just confirm then that— because it was not immediately obvious, but I take from his answer that every entity on that list is a charity? Is that right?

330

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker. There are charities here, but there are also other matters which relate to settlements, which are paid through this head, sometimes settlements which relate to other Departments, but they are always booked through here.

335

There are grants which are, in some instances, I cannot say that they are charitable organisations, but they are community organisations that the hon. Gentleman would recognise as what we might call *de facto* charities, even if they are not registered as charities. Because I cannot say they are. I have not got the list of charities in front of me to confirm that they are charities, but they are, if not charities, akin to charities.

340

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. Obviously, if they are charities or akin to charities, organisations that I would recognise to be like charities, then of course that is — I will write to the hon. Member on the basis that he suggests.

345

If there are entities that do not fall within that, if it is a different sum, then of course I think it is a different point, but he will understand that.

350

Hon. Chief Minister: It is a different point, but it would nonetheless be still confidential, Madam Speaker, because in many instances, if it is not a grant to a charity, it is a settlement usually of a legal action and therefore also has to remain confidential. Or, for example, payments made for relocations, which sometimes are booked here if there is a wider arrangement and settlement done.

But I have no difficulty with him having it. It just has to remain confidential.

355

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Perhaps, Madam Speaker, it is impossible to have this conversation without seeing the schedule. I will write to the hon. Member, and then if there is any issue, I will raise the matter with him behind the Speaker's Chair and then we can discuss whether or not a particular item on that list should remain so confidential.

355 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, if I may, on head 2, line 25, a contribution from the Consolidated Funds to Civil Aviation Authority expenses, the outturn was £47,000 last year and the estimate for this year is a quarter of a million pounds. I was wondering why.

360 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, this is the establishment of the Gibraltar Civil Aviation Register — the Commercial Aviation Register, and that is booked through there as an additional cost of the Civil Aviation Authority. There will be different options as to how that establishes itself but potentially that is the cost of the establishment of the register – the Aircraft Registry, sorry, this year and its part-year cost.

365 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, and then can I also ask, Madam Chair, on subhead 21 of 2, *Ex-gratia* Payments £235,000, what that payment was in the nature of? Is that a collective head for small payments or is it one payment on a particular issue?

370 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, again, this is all the *ex-gratia* payments that are done in respect of *ex-gratia* payments proper, so to speak, and there is a list of all of those *ex-gratia* payments. Again, Madam Speaker, I cannot share that across the floor of the House because these are *ex-gratia* payments subject to proceedings in some instances, etc., but I have no difficulty with sharing a list confidentially with the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Chair: Head 2 stands part of the Bill.

375 **Clerk:** Head 3, Office of the Chief Technical Officer; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Anything on Head 3? Head 3 stands part of the Bill.

380 **Clerk:** Head 4, Customs; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

385 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, I am at head 4, subsection 1. I am at Salaries and I note that there is a difference in £500,000 from the forecast outturn of 2023-24 and the estimate of 2024-25, but there has only been an increment, or an intended increment, of three to the Customs complement. If the Hon. Chief Minister could perhaps give some more information as to the reason for that.

390 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, the clue lies for the hon. Lady in the estimate for 2023-24, where she can see that the number was much higher, it was £6 million, but complement there was not full. Now, Customs have just finished the school, they have completed the complement. I understand they are now at full complement and at full complement that is the cost.

395 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am at subhead 2 now, subheading (11), Training Expenses. I note from the estimate of 2023-24, sorry, where there was a £40,000 estimate for training, it has gone down by 62.5% to £25,000 for 2024-25 and there was a forecast outturn of £25,000 as well in 2023-24. Can the Hon. Chief Minister just give some more information as to the reason for the cuts in training budget, particularly when there are more officers added to the complement?

400 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, for the simple reason that the officers have been added to the complement. That is to say the school has already happened. The training has occurred and it has occurred within that budget. For that reason, we are once again providing the budget that was necessary, although there will be less need to run a school.

405 Madam Speaker, the hon. Lady can see that on an actual of £37,000, we provided £40,000 but
the Department has spent £25,000. That is why we are giving them £25,000 again, because that
is what they have spent in a year where the school has finished. Therefore, what it makes no sense
for this House to do, even if we want to come here and come with headlines like saying it is a 62%
decrease, which I cannot recognise because it is less than a 50% decrease, the suggestion is
somehow we are doing something which is not helpful to Customs when Customs has seen the
410 number of officers increased by, I think, 47 since we were elected. That complement maintained
and added to in other areas, and the training budget increased, even at £25,000, it is considerably
more than they ever had before. I do not think they even have a training budget.

415 **Madam Chair:** Head 4 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 5, Parliament; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 5 stands part of the Bill.

420 **Clerk:** Head 6, Personnel and Development; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, can I just ask for clarification on subhead 1, Personal Emoluments?
Obviously, I understand that that is due to the increase of numbers, which is evident from page
30. The 93 in the Establishment goes up to 113. My question is: are those additional 20 personnel
425 or is it people that have been transferred and relocated and now collected under the Personnel
and Development head, but were somewhere else in the Book last year?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, it is principally supernumerary staff that are now going
to be held directly in the Personnel and Development Department. Before we had supernumerary
430 staff in different parts of the Book. We took the view that if an individual was supernumerary, it
made resourcing sense that they should be held centrally by what we used to call Human
Resources. It will take me a little while to get used to calling it Personnel and Development.

So if somebody is supernumerary, they are now held in the Book under the Personnel and
435 Development head. They can then, because they are supernumerary, be deployed to other
Departments where they may be necessary and where they may not be so supernumerary.

Indeed, they may be transferred as supernumerary here into a place where there is somebody
missing in their grade and, in that way, fill the complement in that particular Department and we
reduce the number of supernumerary individuals held. But this gives us and gives the House a
440 clearer view of the cost of all of those employed in Personnel and Development and all of those
who are supernumerary so we keep that in view rather than having it spread across the 50 Heads.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Thank you. Madam Chair, can I also then turn to 2(11) *Ex-gratia* Payments.
There, having provided a notional sum, it is almost £1.6 million, whereas for next year, they are
not providing a notional sum, it is a very precise sum of £58,000. I am not sure why. Can I ask
445 several questions on that?

First of all, what is the £1.6 million? What falls under this head and what is the difference
between this *ex-gratia* payments and the *ex-gratia* payments I asked about just a few minutes ago
that fell under the Chief Minister's head, I think it was, or Treasury? What type of payments are
paid under here? What is the manner of those payments for last year? Why next year a very
450 precise sum? Is it something envisaged?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, because these are all related to *ex-gratia*
payments made to members of the public service who are covered by the Personnel and
Development Head, that is to say civil servants. All of those, Madam Speaker, relate really to early
455 retirements, principally, which have occurred, and where there has had to be adjustments as a

result of those retirements and other *ex-gratia* amounts which have been paid as a result of that. That totals that amount.

460 The estimate for 2024-25 relates to some payments which are already agreed to be made in respect of the year to come. So instead of providing a £1,000 head, we are able to provide for these payments, which we know will have to be made. They are provided for there, but it may be higher.

465 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. But in relation to the £1.6 million, he is saying that these are public servants and the nature of those payments are all early retirement. So they are booked there rather than being booked somewhere else in some kind of pension provision?

470 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, from what I can see, these are all civil servants. I think that is why they are booked through here. In some instances, they are done through the GDC, which means that they are paid in a different way. There is a transfer into the GDC and a payment elsewhere in the Book. These are actually civil servants and the payments and settlements made as a result.

Madam Chair: Head 6 stands part of the Bill.

475 **Clerk:** Head 7, Immigration and Civil Status; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

480 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, if I may, on subhead 2, line 17, Security Services, I note the outturn for 2023-24, £64,000 and yet the estimate for 2024-25 is £30,000, obviously more than half. Looking back to 2022-23 it was about 60,000. I am just wondering why Security Services has halved.

485 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, because we are moving CSRO to new offices where they will not need that level of security cover that they have today, where they are much more exposed. They will be much less exposed than their new offices, so there is a saving on security.

490 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Chair, can I ask on 2(16), the Contribution from the Consolidated Fund to the Borders and Coast Guard Agency. The estimate last year was £7.6 million, the forecast out to £8.2 million. I wanted to understand that a bit more, because when I turned to page 198, which is the Borders and Coast Guard Agency, and specifically 197, I thought originally when I saw that figure, it might be because there is more personnel, but the personnel at 197, the Establishment, is the same. Unless of course there were vacant posts.

Perhaps, because the difference is quite sizable there, about £600,000, I did not really understand why the increase. So I am asking the hon. Member for that.

495 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I understand this relates to the computation of allowances and how they are paid in pay.

500 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** That summary answer I am not sure perhaps gives us the information as to why that is the case. I am not sure that I follow the hon. Member, because presumably the allowances were already part and parcel of the original estimates factored in. I am not sure that I understand that.

505 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman goes to 198 he will see that the pension contribution goes up, the forecast outturn for allowances goes down, Madam Speaker, and the salaries vote goes up because of the computation of the allowances and which ones are included in salary and which ones are not included in salary.

Madam Chair: Anything else on Head 7? We are on Head 7 at the moment, any other questions?

510

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, it is just that given the answer, I suppose I had a follow-up on that page 198 but we are going to get to that page, I think.

Madam Chair: Head 7 stands part of the Bill.

515

Clerk: Head 8, Government Law Officers; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Chair, subheading 2, line 7, I note that the estimate is lower for 2024-25 than the forecast outturn for 2023-24. Now, the estimate for 2023-24 was £15,000. The forecast outturn for 2023-24 was £25,000 yet the estimate for 2024-25 for witnesses is £12,000. Is there a particular reason for that? Can I assume that the caseload is lower?

520

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, this tends to be led by what the Government law officers in consultation with the Office of Criminal Prosecutions tell us they anticipate based on their calendar of trials to come and what they anticipate the witnesses would be. My view frankly is that we should have just a £1,000 line there but if there is expenditure that is envisaged or that on average has been a particular amount then we put in the amount that we are advised should be put in.

525

The hon. Lady will see, and it is the one figure she has not mentioned in her analysis, that in 2022-23 it was £9,000. So this is really swings and roundabouts, you could have one year when it might cost £100,00 and in the following year it might cost £8,000. That is the figure that we are asked by OCPL to consider putting in, it is not anything else.

530

Hon. J Ladislaus: Yes, Madam Chair, I am at line 21, Professional Fees, and the forecast outturn for 2023-24 was £4.9 million, whereas the estimate for 2023-24 was £2.5 million. We are almost at, if my maths serves me correctly – and it is not my strong point – £2.4 million over. Could the Hon. the Chief Minister shed some light as to the reason for that?

535

Hon. Chief Minister: This is the cost of private sector legal fees, all of which go through here, and we have this constant issue of how much we should put in. The year that we have spent less, we spent £2.5 million, I seem to recall, so we try and always put in that figure so that there is not a licence here to spend more than usual. But in some years it is necessary to spend more and in this year once again it has been necessary to spend more.

540

We have no alternative but to incur those fees when we need to incur them. Madam Speaker, we always try and seek to ensure that we are as close to the estimate as possible but we do not want to increase the estimate because if we increase the estimate we do not want people to think that there is a licence to spend more.

545

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask on a follow-up on that? If I write to the hon. Member because I assume he may not have a schedule here, would he be willing to provide us a schedule on that item?

550

Hon. Chief Minister: We do not have it here, Madam Speaker, but I think he will find that those fees are very likely the ones reflected on the website, the private sector legal fees, but I am very happy to give him the schedule as we have it so that he can see it. But, again, that would also have to remain confidential because that is Government legal advice, but I can give him the headings of what it is that has been taken advice on, so that he can see.

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560 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, I was not necessarily asking him to tell me what they had taken advice on, I was just asking for a breakdown of the costs. If they are publishing the costs anyway, I am not sure that that part should be confidential. I am not asking him to know what they are doing.

565 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are publishing the costs. The hon. Gentleman knows that there is a Government website where he sees all the private sector legal fees which will principally be these. There could be – I do not think there is but there could be – something here that is not yet on the website or that might not be reflected on the website, but I doubt that because even when we use external counsel, which are external to Gibraltar directly instructed by the Government of Gibraltar, we put that on the website. I am not saying that should be
570 confidential for one moment but okay if he writes to me I will give him the breakdown without saying what it is that we have taken advice on.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That would be helpful because sometimes the figures do not correlate, so that is the reason for my question.

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Madam Chair: Head 8 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 9, Financial Secretary's Office; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 9 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 10, Social Security; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, in relation to subhead 2, I will do one at a time. Line 16, the
585 estimates for 2023-24 was £15.2 million and the outturn was £6 million. Obviously the estimate for 2024-25 is now £7 million. Can the Hon. Chief Minister advise what the reason for the decrease, at least, from 2023-24 and to the outturn?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Chair, this is to keep the fund solvent. I think I referred to this during the course of – I or the Father of the House referred to this during the course of the
590 speech, either this year or the year before. This is what keeps the fund solvent.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Chair, I think he may be confusing that with 17, which I have not actually asked yet. I am talking about line 16, which is the Social Assistance Fund.

595

Hon. Chief Minister: No, Madam Speaker, I think you may be confusing the issue. That is also the position in respect of 16.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, I think I have answered my own question. The answer is on
600 page 239, which is the analysis of the Social Assistance Fund. The reason, for the benefit of Members, is that there is obviously £7.5 million less due to non-payment of a contribution to Gibraltar Community Care. I note that there is no provision for next year either.

If I can move on to item 17, which is the Statutory Benefits Fund. Can the Chief Minister advise why there was no contribution in 2023-2024?

605

Hon. Chief Minister: Because none was required, Madam Speaker.

Hon. R M Clinton: On that basis, the Chief Minister then, I guess, is advising that the Statutory Benefits Fund was solvent at that point, it needed no assistance?

610

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair: Head 10 stands part of the Bill.

615 **Clerk:** Head 11, Digital Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 11 stands part of the Bill.

620 **Clerk:** Head 12, Information Technology and Logistics Department; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Do you have something to say? Does the hon. Member want to speak?

625 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, yes, indeed. Can I ask on head 12, 2(12) Maintenance Agreements and Licences, there is a significant increase in the estimate for maintenance agreements and licences? I am not sure what that head encapsulates, so first of all can we have information about what is under that head and, secondly, why the increase?

630 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Chair, this is a head that has been growing considerably since we were elected and we moved away from the situation which we found ourselves in, which was that the Government was in effect pirating software and not paying licences. We decided that that, of course, could not continue. We have put ourselves in good stead with all of the providers of software to the Government. There are an increased number of users. There are more licences as a result. There is an increase in the cost of the licences that we pay. But there is also work being done to move to open source licensing in some areas, which may mean that we do not actually
635 have to hit that number if we can repurpose in some areas where it is possible to repurpose.

I can take the hon. Gentleman through it but we will be here until tomorrow. Again if he wants to see this, I am very happy to provide him with a copy of the schedule if he writes to me. This is obviously commercially in confidence but not confidential in the other sense.

640

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, we will. So it is not just software licences, I assume, because it is called Maintenance Agreement so presumably some element of that £6.5 million is in relation to formal agreements with external providers to maintain some of the infrastructure, is that right?

645 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, because the servers, Madam Speaker, are also provided for here and the maintenance of the servers is provided by an external provider.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That is a contract situation with a particular provider for a specific term presumably?

650

Hon. Chief Minister: They are contracts, plural not just one.

Madam Chair: Head 12 stands part of the Bill

655 **Clerk:** Head 13, Broadcasting; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 13 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 14, Gibraltar Regulatory Authority; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 14 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 15, Office of the Deputy Chief Ministers; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

665

Hon. D J Bossino: Subhead 2(9), can the Hon. Deputy Chief Minister provide an explanation for the increase from the actual figure of 2022-23 of around about £90,000 to now it seems a pretty stable figure in the region of £300,000 to £200,000.

670

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Yes, Madam Chair, this really depends on the amount of lobbying which is envisaged and which is actually carried out. So it is one of these things which is likely to vary but, as he says, it has stabilised over the last couple of years.

Hon. D J Bossino: Lobbying focused in relation to what?

675

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: It could cover all the different issues I mentioned during my Budget address.

680

Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to subhead 2(13), can you provide a breakdown for that figure of £105,000, which, again, it looks like a stable figure to me?

685

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Yes, that relates to some of the works and contingencies the Government has prepared over the years in relation to our departure from the European Union. Some of those were carried out together, if you recall my Budget address, with the United Kingdom and were co-funded with them, and others were carried out by the Government itself.

Hon. D J Bossino: In the nature of infrastructural works, presumably in the context of the potential no-deal scenario?

690

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: That is right, all this relates to no-deal planning work, making sure we have contingencies in place for different eventualities.

695

Hon. D J Bossino: Subhead 2(18), the Mount Expenses, can you explain what that relates to? It is not a big figure but I am just interested to see that it refers to the Mount and is a separate head and separate expenditure in relation to that particular project.

700

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: That is right. This has been there for a long time. Part of the reason is because this vote originally came under Culture who looked after the Mount and this was then passed on to us because of the ongoing works of the Mount. It is to do mainly with maintenance works that may arise.

705

Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to subhead 2 (19), the Hong Kong Office, I think we had a question and answer session in relation to this about two or three years ago. I am not aware, I certainly do not recall that we have one, so can he provide an explanation? Again, it is not big amount.

710

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Chair, the Hong Kong office has always been put under my head for reasons of neatness, but it is not an office I was involved in directly, because this relates mainly to commercial work and not to political work like the other two.

But my understanding is that this is there because there were some loose ends that remained to be tied up and that sum reflects those loose ends.

Hon. D J Bossino: Can you provide any further information as to what those loose ends are? The figure for the forecast outturn for 2023-24 is, again, a very tiny figure of £3,000, but I am just interested to see what the Government's intentions are in relation to that. He has set down a

715 placeholder figure of £1,000, but I would be interested to know what loose ends commercially, as
he puts it, the Government is considering in this context.

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Yes. Madam Chair, I am told that the amount there refers to the
720 annual fees of the company in Hong Kong that now needs to be wound up. It is basically an
administrative fee for the company that still exists, but it is not active in any way.

Hon. D J Bossino: So this is a historical situation – the Government is, just to summarise, now
winding things down as far as that particular company is concerned. Presumably there is no
intention of reigniting that into the future.

725 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** Madam Chair, that is correct.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, the Deputy Chief has piqued my interest. Can you tell us
anything about this company, where it is incorporated and what is its name?

730 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is incorporated in Hong Kong, which is where the office
was, and the fees are payable to a trust and company management services provider in Hong
Kong.

735 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful for that, but do we have a name?

Hon. Chief Minister: Surprisingly, Madam Speaker, I think it is Gibraltar (Hong Kong) Office Ltd.

Madam Chair: Head 15 stands part of the Bill.

740

Clerk: Head 16, Civil aviation; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. D J Bossino: Subhead 2(3), Contribution towards Aerodrome Running Expenses. I just
745 wanted to know why the envisaged increase for the forecast outturn figure to the estimated
figure.

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Chair, my understanding is twofold. Firstly, that this is the
now historic agreement between the Government of Gibraltar and the Ministry of Defence, which
relates precisely to those issues, that there is an increase as time goes on, and also dependent on
750 the usage, if I am not mistaken.

Hon. D J Bossino: When the hon. Member refers to an increase ‘as time goes on’, are these
contractual increases which are interwoven into the terms of the agreement, so that therefore
that is the commercial arrangement which the Gibraltar Government has with the Ministry of
755 Defence, or is it something else?

Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Madam Chair, yes, it is interwoven into the agreement.

Madam Chair: Head 16 stands part of the Bill.

760

Clerk: Head 17, Environment; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, just looking at payroll, General Office has gone up from an
outturn of £28,000 to £245,000. I do notice that, of course, complements has gone up from 54 to
765 64, but is that increase entirely due to that headcount increase? Why such a lot? If it is just general
office, what are 10 people doing in general office?

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Chair, most of this is taken into account in the establishment where you can see the ministerial office. These were officers that were in other Departments prior to the change in ministerial responsibilities. Most of those were in fact under the Transport head in previous years because transport, traffic and environment have now consolidated under my ministry. They have been shifted into here and that is what accounts for the majority of that.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Chair, I am at head 1, Cleansing Section – subsection (m), Salaries. I noticed that the estimate was £163,000, the outturn £129,000, but there has been no movement on the number of employees in the cleansing section. Can the hon. Member please clarify why there has been an increase in that amount?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Can the hon. Member repeat the section he is referring to? I did not catch that. And the question was?

Hon. G Origo: It has gone from £163,000 down to £129,000, yet the number of employees in the Cleansing Section has stayed the same. Is there a reason for the savings in this area?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Chair. I think this will happen in other parts as well. This is taking account of vacancies that would have been full provision in the past. The complement is the same, but there are vacancies and that has not been included there.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Chair, can I ask on 2, subhead (15), Cleaning of Streets and Public Places? There is an increase there. The estimate was £6.4 million, the forecast outturn £8.32 million – £2 million more. Is that a contractual increase? Because the estimate is lower this year, so it does not look like a contractual increase, and perhaps the Minister can give us some information about why that happened that way.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: There is an element that is contractual, but clearly the amount that is actually spent will depend on a number of things. We tend to increase cleaning above the contractual, particularly in the summer months and particularly if we have an extended period without rain into the autumn. So, that is what covers that. It is usually to do with an increase in flushing – more regular flushing – when the streets need it.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. So, you have what you would call the regular cleaning, which costs X, and then, if I have understood the hon. Member's explanation, built into the contracts there is a provision that the Government can, on request, ask for specific flushing or cleaning and that is an add-on cost. Is that right? So the additional would be covered by that, principally, is that right? Does he have a breakdown or not?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: The breakdown can be provided, but that is correct. We can request additional cleaning over and above the contractual frequency, which obviously comes at a cost. Again, that information can be supplied if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition wants to raise it with me separately.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Chair. At head 4, Support payments, can the Hon. Minister please explain the incurred expense of £62,000 and what these relate to? Because they have not appeared before in previous or future estimates.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I believe, Madam Chair, that there was a similar question to one of the previous heads. I think the Hon. Chief Minister replied. This is the support payment that was agreed last year. I think it appears in quite a few of the heads; in all of them.

820 **Hon. D J Bossino:** On (23) and the running of Alameda Gardens and Wildlife Ltd, is this Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd which has been the subject of exchanges in this House before?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Clearly so, Madam Chair.

825 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The figure of £1.25 million, is that the totality of the moneys which the Government gives to this particular company?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: As far as I know, yes, Madam Chair. That is what is provided for under the contract, and that is provided for in the estimates.

830 **Hon. D J Bossino:** This is from memory, but I think this company does other things other than the Alameda Gardens. This is why I ask, because it says 'Running of Alameda Gardens'. So, is this expenditure only in relation to that aspect of the works that this company does for the Government, or is it the totality of the commercial arrangements with the Gibraltar Government?

835 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** If it appears as 'Running of the Alameda Gardens', I believe that it is to do with the running of the Alameda Gardens.

840 **Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to the cemeteries, we have 6 and we have 32, and they are distinguished between 'Cemetery Expenses' and 'Upkeep of Cemeteries' – in the plural – 'Greenarc'. What therefore, in that context, by way of background, does cemeteries expenses relate to?

845 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** 6 is in relation to general expenses in the cemetery, whereas 32 is specifically the maintenance of the vegetation, strimming, and so on. It is a contract with that company.

850 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, on subhead (6), I note that the hon. Member stated that it relates to general maintenance of the cemetery. We can see that in the previous year it was £22,000, the forecast was £23,000; we have forecasted £24,000 the following year. So why is it that this year we have an outturn of £75,000, which is three times more than the usual expense?

855 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** There was quite a lot of work required. I believe this may include the refurbishment of toilets and there was quite a lot of work being done this year in the cemetery, more than usual.

860 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And (13), Morocco Relations. Can I ask for what the thinking and rationale is behind the expenditure, which in this case has not been given a notional £1,000 figure, but there is a specific figure of £15,000, and this is why I ask. Can you give a breakdown in relation to that and what is envisaged?

865 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes. Madam Chair, the proposal is that this would cover assistance to different Departments in developing relations with Moroccan entities during the course of the year. It may include assistance to trade missions, a bit of travel perhaps, and general development of relations. It is a new inclusion here. It is a new ministerial responsibility. So it is a modest sum which will be available to develop contacts with our southern neighbours.

870 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I drill down further on the first limb of his answer, when he talks about assistance to different Departments. Presumably he is referring to Gibraltar Government Departments, and in that context, why does it result in an expenditure to the Government purse?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, it is not necessarily in that way. It may be that there is a cultural exchange with Morocco, or there may be a business delegation, and it is in order to promote, encourage, and assist development of relations.

875 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Would the Hon. Minister agree with me if I were to say that the vast majority of these expenses would therefore be related to travel and things like that?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I am not able to say. I think there will be an element of that, but not necessarily.

880

Madam Chair: Was there anything else? (*Interjection*) Head 17 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 18, Collection and Disposal of Refuse; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Chair, can I ask on subhead 2(9), Disposal of Other Items. The estimate £3.6 million, the forecast outturn £6.2 million. So, more than £2 million above. Can I ask what that Head of Expenditure is used for, and why the increase there?

890 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** This is related to the disposal of items other than the normal rubbish – municipal waste – so it would be including the larger items and so on. This does fluctuate in the amount that we produce and there is a certain element that is outside our control in relation to fees across the border.

895 But we are hopeful – we have just published an expressions of interest to try and deal with waste in a different way – that we will not need to spend the amount that we spend this year. This is why we have included a more modest sum. Something that we are trying to control.

900 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** This disposal of the items happens in Spain, does it? Or does it get transhipped somewhere else? And when he says, ‘these are items other than municipal waste’, meaning what? If he can give us a range, we understand it. Perhaps also, at the tail end of his answer when he says that whether their thinking is to deal with it in a different way; in what way?

905 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** This is largely bulky items and recyclates. The expressions of interest is calling for waste separation and possibly dealing it in a different way – perhaps not going to where these items go now. But obviously we have to wait and see what proposals come in.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: These items are – did he say non-recyclable or recyclables?

910 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** This will include the bulky items like mattresses and large things like that, and recyclates; the recycle element of the refuse, which is collected separately.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: When we see around Gibraltar everything being collected in different ways for recycling, and I think the hon. Member has indicated – I do not know if the hon. Member wants me to pause while he has the aside, so he can listen to the question.

915 Everything is collected separately for recycling and the hon. Member, I think, has indicated in this House before that the recycling then gets transported across to Spain. Is that cost within this item, or is it somewhere else in the Heads of Expenditure?

920 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** That cost is included there. Again, if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition wishes to have a breakdown, I can make this available to him. It includes the cost to ‘*Mancomunidad*’. It includes pallets and bulky items, it includes asbestos, etc. So there is a whole breakdown that I can provide.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, just looking under 'Other Charges to Wages' and the emergency overtime. The overtime is £1.2 million. In relation to wages, it is about 70% of the wage bill. If you look in the outturn on 2022-23, it is about 62% of the wage bill. Can the Minister explain how this arises? Is there a set formula?

It is remarkable that it is always emergency overtime. There is no other form of overtime worked. Is there something that – just seems odd, Madam Chair, that there is consistently a high level of overtime equivalent to certainly more than 50% of the wage bill. Does the Minister have any visibility as to why there is so much emergency overtime? I can understand some overtime, but £1.2 million of emergency overtime?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Chair, this is something that I am sure that, if you were to check the Estimates Book over two or three decades, you will see there is a large element of overtime. It is almost the nature of the industry that a lot of this work is done in unsociable hours and that is why there is a large element of overtime in this head. We are looking at ways in which we can tackle this, but at the moment, that is the way the industry works. They are working unsociable hours.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, I appreciate that and I appreciate his point if you go back a number of years. But can he explain then why he has put in a notional £1,000 for 2024-25 if historically there has been – it would appear to be at least £1 million in that line.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, this is one of the things that might change. We are looking at a change in the way we deal with this, so putting in any figure would not be accurate – no matter what figure we put – because we are looking at changing this and reducing this.

Madam Chair: Head 18 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 19, Upper Rock Tourist Sites and Beaches; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Chair, can I ask on 2(16), Sites Management Systems. The estimate last year was £1.8 million, the forecast outturn £2.5 million, the estimate for next year £3.8 million – so, about £700,000 more spent than last year on what they estimate. Different questions there. First of all, why the increase of £700,000 there? What does this head cover; sites management systems? Then, what is the reason for another £1.3 million in spend in this subhead?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Chair, I think that we had a similar question at this stage last year. The answer is the same. This is the ticketing system which controls access to all the sites on the Upper Rock and elsewhere. The fact that it has gone up is a good sign, because there is a formula that this increases in relation to the number of visitors and the increase in the number of visitors. So, in fact, there is more now coming in; more than the 700,000 or so is expected to come in than will actually go out. This is a reflection of an increase in visitor numbers.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if it will assist the hon. Gentleman, he may want to look at line 17 on page 7, which is the revenue page, and there you can see the co-relation between the increases in the cost versus the increases in the receipts that are coming in to the Government.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I think I mentioned in my Budget speech that there had been an increase in a couple of million in income because of the increase.

975 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. These are two sides of the same coin, I think. The Chief Minister points me to the revenue page, but this is the expenditure page. Let me just set out my understanding; the Minister perhaps can confirm whether that is so.

This part, which is the expenditure, is reflective of higher numbers, but this particular sum, whatever it is in this column, is paid under contractual arrangements to those administering the system, is that right?

980 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, it is a contractual fee.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So that is the contractual fee, and this is a contractual fee payable to one particular operator who has been the subject of recent questions in the House, is that correct?

985 **Hon. Chief Minister:** This is three different payments. Three different contractual payments for three different operators.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, it is three different contractors? I see. All right. Well, perhaps I can seek that information on another occasion.

990

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, just to follow up on a point from the Leader of the Opposition. We have been referred to the increase in revenue and the increase in cost as a sort of linkage between the two. But if it is a ticketing system, I can understand the linkage to, for example, volume of visitors in terms of numbers of tickets issued. Therefore that would affect, I presume, the maintenance of machinery or whatever equipment. But of course the Government can increase the cost of tickets unilaterally. My question is: is the formula linked to the price of the ticket, i.e. the revenue, or is it linked to the volume of visitors?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes I believe it is linked to the volume of visitors, yes. If I am wrong, I will be corrected and I will rectify it, but my understanding is volume of visitors.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Chair. I guess the point I am making is it should be on numbers of tickets issued, but not as a percentage of the revenue of the Government.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes I believe that that is the way it works. That is what I just answered.

Madam Chair: Head 19 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 20, Education; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1010

Madam Chair: Anything on Head 20?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Chair, may I ask – this is 2 and 12, under the Discretionary scholarships. The forecast outturn £1.5 million, the provision on discretionary £700,000. Is that because they are envisaging providing less? Or is it that this is a provision and it may be more depending on the applications?

1015

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes To a large extent, this is demand-led and it is also subject to the independent scholarships panel to see which discretionary scholarship they deem should be supported. So, it could be more and then it could be less. It is a figure that we never quite know until the full process, which is ongoing at the moment, is finalised.

1020

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Chair, this is section 1, Payroll and it is Special Needs Learning Support Assistance and Temporary Cover. Given that every year they insert a nominal value, but it is

1025 significant sums that we are seeing every year for temporary cover and SNLSAs. Can the Hon. Minister clarify why they do not reflect more accurate estimates, given that they could? It would be reasonable to argue that, from the previous figures that they are seeing every year, they could estimate a more accurate estimate than a nominal figure of £1,000.

1030 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Madam Chair, this is a similar point to the one raised earlier in relation to the overtime in refuse. As we have increased the numbers, we are aiming to reduce this as much as possible. In many ways, because of the nature of what these members of staff do, it is demanded, so any figure that we were to place there would not be accurate. The convention has been over the years – and continues to be – that we represent it in this way.

1035 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Chair, on subhead 2(7) and the Gibraltar College, there is a provision for £30,000. It does not specify what exactly does the College use those £30,000 for.

1040 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** These are specific costs. I think, again, the question was asked last year. They are running costs in relation to the College that have, by convention again, been singled out. But there is nothing there that is unusual. It is just running costs and so on.

1045 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Yes, but what draws my attention is I know that through Question Time we have established that vocational courses and so on are being administered by the College, and that is covered under 2(15), which is Vocational Courses. So, if no other school gets a £30,000 bonus, what does the College need those £30,000 for?

1050 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** The other schools do get a capitation, which is not specifically broken down. It is just that, almost by tradition, the College expenses have been included separately. It is not anything other than that.

1055 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask on 2(31), which is St Mary's School, the description of the head is Rent and Building Insurance Fees. Does the Minister have a breakdown of what is rent and what is the building insurance under the forecast outturn of £852,000 and then the estimate for next year £1.2 million?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes I am sure I speak for all of us on this side when I thank the staff of the Financial Secretary for being on hand.

1060 Yes, the rent is approximately £1.135 million, building insurance £13,000 and rates £84,000. That brings it to £1.23 million. The reason for the difference is that last year the school opened in September, therefore there is not a full-year effect – it is about three-quarters of the year – whereas this year it will have been in use for the whole of the financial year and therefore that is that is a difference between the two figures.

1065 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Subhead 2(9), Special Education Abroad. What is that about?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes That is children who, for some reason or other, need to be in schools outside Gibraltar for – could be supported needs, could be other related matters where it is felt that they need special schools outside Gibraltar.

1070 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is he able to say how many?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes I believe we have one at this moment in time.

1075 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The estimated figure, would that be for that one child or is the Government estimating and making provision for potentially more than one?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes I believe this is for one. These are very special and expensive details, a lot of high intensity care and supervision and so on.

1080 **Madam Chair:** Head 20 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 21, Heritage; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1085 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So 2(13), which refers to Heritage and 1.372 – I think this question has been raised in the past, but I will raise it again if I have. Is that the Knightsfield Holdings Ltd contract? Is it the totality of that, or am I mistaken?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes That is correct, Madam Chair.

1090 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am correct that I am mistaken, or I am correct that it relates to the Knightsfield Holdings Ltd contract?

Madam Chair: The danger of asking two questions in one go.

1095 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Madam Chair, it is correct that it is the Knightsfield museum contract.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Hon. Minister able to say why it is envisaged that the contract sum has increased? Well, it has increased and it is envisaged that it will maintain itself at that level.

1100 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Yes. I am advised that this is the IRP increase in the contract.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, if you look at head 17, Environment, wherever there is a contract for running something, the name of the entity is listed and yet here in Heritage it is not. I wonder if the Minister would consider actually listing whoever it is that is running the contract.

1105

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes The fact that it is not listed here? This is the way that it has been done. I do not have any say in the actual wording. For some, the company is mentionable, some it is not. I do not know the particular reason; that has been like that since before I was a Minister.

1110 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, could I encourage the Minister just to add it for sake of completeness?

1115 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** The thing is, if anything, it should be removed because otherwise we would have to list every single contract, which I think would be a little bit too much. I do not know. I agree that there should be consistency, but in which direction?

1120 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I have no difficulty in somehow reflecting the Knightsfield element there. I think they provide excellent value for money. They have got us on the front page of *The New York Times*; they have got us into the *National Geographic*; they have got us a television series on Netflix. Highlighting them there, as the hon. Mr Clinton suggests, I think is no bad thing.

Although I do understand that this is how it was booked in their time, and so therefore must have been the right way to do it then. But I have absolutely no difficulty in either in brackets or some other way, perhaps in a footnote, reflecting it to payment to Knightsfield.

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Madam Chair: Head 21 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 22, Driver and Vehicle Licensing; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1130 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can I ask on 2(17), the Incentive Scheme on the Importation of Hybrid Vehicles, which had an estimate of £50,000 and a forecast outturn of £270,000. Is that increase because there has been additional take-up under the incentive scheme? Can someone perhaps explain that to us?

1135 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** There has been an increase in hybrid vehicles. I think I mentioned in my speech last week, and in answer to a Question before that, that the main type of vehicle being registered now is in fact hybrid. That reflects that. It is difficult to tell whether that will continue. Clearly we prefer that to go in the direction of electric vehicles. So we are not quite sure what this year is going to bring, but the fact is that hybrid vehicles are now about 70% of vehicles sold.

1140 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So the sum provided is, while not notional, it may be exceeded if there is a trend on take-up of this particular vehicle next year? Which of course we all want to encourage anyway.

1145 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** I think that is a realistic representation of what might happen.

Hon. D J Bossino: I will try and take this in some order. 2(11), professional fees of £2,000, which seems to be a fixed amount. Can he say what that relates to?

1150 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Madam Chair, this is in relation to Blue Badge requests and medical advice in relation to licences and so on. So, from here it is largely medical fees.

1155 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And 2(13), the Blue Badge scheme, which does not seem to be moving; we have no shown sums and then zero expense, so there is no burdening of the public purse. But I just wanted to understand why it is that there is not any movement under the Blue Badge scheme.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes That is not really something that costs much. It is administratively done and in future it will be done by the ministry of my colleague the Minister for Equality. I am told that that is the cost that would normally go into printing of the badges.

1160 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The cost which has amounted to nought at this stage?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes They must have printed quite a few in the previous year, so they had plenty of stock.

1165 **Hon. D J Bossino:** In relation to 15, Training Expenses, can you explain why there is a significant jump from £2,000 to £57,000?

1170 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Yes, indeed. We want to upskill the team at the DVLD. We think it is important in ensuring proper management of drivers and for safety purposes. So we are intending to increase the amount of training of the transport inspectors, of the senior inspectors, and so on. There is a whole list – it includes training in the UK – and I am happy to provide the breakdown separately to the hon. Member.

1175 **Madam Chair:** Head 22 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 23, Technical Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, just out of interest, in subhead 2, line 13 and 14, we have two different cleaning services. I was wondering why Technical Services has, in fact, any line for

1180 cleaning when we have contracts for cleaning with Britannia. I was wondering what the difference
is.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes Sorry, I did not catch the last bit. I am not wearing my hearing aid.
Seriously.

1185

Hon. R M Clinton: I did not know you needed one. But I was just wondering why Technical
Services has lines for cleaning where we have contracts with Britannia?

1190 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** I think the cleaning of street gullies is more specialised. It includes raising
the drains and cleaning inside and so on, so I think that is separate. Cleaning services is in relation
to office cleaning of all the various different Departments that Technical Services has in various
parts of Gibraltar.

1195 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Sorry, Madam Chair. I am not quite sure I understand the last point, that the
cleaning is of various suboffices of Technical Services? Because I think each Department has their
own cleaning expense.

1200 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Yes, that is correct. It is cleaning of the premises. It is the cleaning of the
whole of Joshua Hassan House, Duke of Kent House – that area – as well as the other outposts, if
I can call them that, that they have. The garage, the sewer section – Technical Services has
Departments in different parts of Gibraltar and this is what covers the cleaning of all those
facilities. It is quite a lot of real estate.

1205 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So coming back to the cleaning of street gullies. By street gullies, am I to
understand he means the sewers?

1210 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** No. I mean the gullies, that if they are not cleaned properly – particularly
just before the onset of the autumn rains – and they are not cleared out of any accretions and
accumulations that have happened, particularly through the summer, we get flooding. So, it is
quite specialist work and that is what is provided there, as has been provided for many years.

Hon. R M Clinton: I understand. Then, just for the sake of completeness, sewers work would
appear where? Or does that come under Environment and I may have missed it? If so, I apologise.

1215 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I gave that analysis in the context of my responses to
Mr Sacarello – who I wish well; I understand he is not well from what we have been told by the
Leader of the Opposition. The hon. Gentleman would have seen from the Excel sheet that was
circulated that that is in the I&D.

1220 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes** Just to repeat what the Chief Minister said, it looks like the hon. Mr Clinton
has not picked it up. The sewer work is included in the provision provided in the capital under the
I&D.

1225 **Madam Chair:** Head 23 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 24, Economic Development; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1230 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, I think we may have discussed this last year on subhead 2,
line 13, Economic Research. I think I remember vaguely last year the Hon. Father of the House
referred to some work he was doing on returning students, etc.

It has come in at £160,000; he has got it down at £300,000 for 2024-25. Could he shed some light on what is envisaged to be done under Economic Research?

1235 **Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano):** Madam Chair, the figure that we put is increased because we are expecting that there will be more activity in this financial year than there was last year, and that the research is undertaken in estimating and evaluating whether something is worth proceeding with or not. So it is based on an assumption that we will be doing much more this year than we did last year.

1240 It is evaluating potential areas that we will support or not support as part of the National Economic Plan in capital works in the private sector. There is a cost and sometimes it is a cost that cannot be recovered if the decision is not to proceed. So, if we evaluate a particular proposal that we get to support something and we find that we do not think that is a viable proposition, the money cannot be recovered. If it is something that actually goes ahead, then we recover the cost that we engaged in – the support that is given – and therefore it is not charged to that head.

1245

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, I am grateful to the Minister's explanation. Can he advise, for 2024-25, whether any element of that is outsourced to professionals such as accountants, etc.

1250 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** This is the costs that are incurred in the company that employs a number of people; a declining number of people, in fact. It is funded from the Department, but the expenditure takes place in the company, and it deals with the work that they are doing.

The principal work nowadays is the people that are in the reclamation area on the Eastside, which were in charge of ensuring where the rubble used to be deposited and so on. We had a number of workers there. The company, Gibraltar General Services Ltd, is 100% funded from this head, but it is a declining cost because in fact the company will not replace people who retire.

1255

But the activity is linked to us giving support in areas and, until very recently, much of it was related to the area of refuse and the area of rubble from building sites where we deployed workers and it was paid from this head.

1260 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, I am grateful to the Minister. If I understand it correctly, Gibraltar General Services Ltd would effectively then contract for any services that may be required – specialist services – to evaluate National Economic Plan projects, and that the Minister is effectively repurposing the company.

1265 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, is the hon. Gentleman asking about line 13 or line 25?

Hon. R M Clinton: I was asking about line 13, Madam Chair.

1270 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I thought so. Madam Speaker, when the hon. Gentleman said 2024-25, I think the Minister's attention was turned to line 25. The answer he has been giving about the reclamation and the company there, which is declining, is about line whilst, from the second question, I think that the hon. Gentleman expected his question about professionals to be answered about line 13, not about line 25, but in respect of the year 2024-25. I think that is the confusion that has arisen.

1275 Just to assist the House, the question that the hon. Gentleman put, which is in relation to line 13, Economic Research, and whether any of that £300,000 includes fees for professionals, the answer is it does include fees for professionals. The other answer, which is about the individuals who were being repurposed because they were — the reclamation on the Eastside, which is no longer in our control, related to line 25.

1280 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask, Madam Chair, on (15), which is the Additional Contribution. There is a forecasted contribution – an increase of about £1.1 million for next year. Am I reading this right, that that is representative of additional staff costs across the Government?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I think it reflects the increase in the minimum wage.

1285 **Madam Chair:** Any other questions on Head 24? Head 24 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 25, Statistics office; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 25 stands part of the Bill.

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Clerk: Head 26, Health and Care; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1295 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, at the risk of being a broken record, subhead 2, line 10, which is the Additional Contribution to the Care Agency. I again bring to the attention of the House, the question of this £10 million settlement payment and where this should be properly reflected, given that it has already been incurred.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

1300

Madam Chair: Head 26 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 27, Utilities; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1305 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Chair, can I ask – under 2(3), Additional Contribution, the forecast outturn £31.5 million. Is that related to the fuel issue that the Hon. Chief Minister was talking about in his principal speech?

1310 **(Minister for Health, Care and Business) Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, Madam Chair, it is to match the costs incurred by the GEA.

1315 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, can I ask in respect of subhead 2, specifically in respect to water, lines 5 to 7. In the utility bills there is a little box that says, 'The Government is subsidising the bill by X amount', but looking at this, it would appear that the bulk of the expense seems to be in respect to the saltwater system. Is that correct? In which case, in terms of potable fresh water, it is only envisaged to be £90,000. Am I reading this correctly or is there something I am missing?

1320 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the subsidy is across the board. These are the contracts which AquaGib enters into, but the subsidy is measured across the board. So it is not reflected here.

1325 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, that would make sense. May I encourage the Minister to consider perhaps amending the description?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, we believe it accurately describes the situation.

1330 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am sorry, Madam Chair, the Minister just said it is across the board and you are saying 'saltwater system contract' accurately describes the situation. It seems to be contradictory.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. Gentleman missed the first part of the Minister's contribution where she said that the subsidy is not paid here, it is paid across the board, it is paid in the company. These amounts are the amounts which are properly provided for with those descriptions.

1335 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, in which case, where is the amount paid to the company reflected?

Hon. Chief Minister: It is within the company, Madam Speaker.

1340 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, where does the company receive the money from? It has got to come from the Government from some area, the Consolidated Fund.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the Government takes a lower dividend.

1345 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Sorry, Madam Chair, the taking of a dividend from the company is not the same as a subsidy. So, is the Government saying that what they tell people is a subsidy is in fact a lower dividend? Is that what we are being told?

1350 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker. It is a subsidy because the Government's share of the dividend is not taken by the Government. It is provided to be kept in as a subsidy to the cost of water to the individual. So instead of taking it as a dividend and then paying it back as a subsidy, we simply forego that amount of dividend which is kept by the company to subsidise the production of fuel, but not in the element of the other shareholder. The other shareholder does not subsidise water in Gibraltar, only the Government subsidises water in Gibraltar.

1355 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, at the risk of — I am not going to labour the point, but obviously, from a corporate profitability point of view, you cannot declare a dividend for a profit you do not have. It would appear that there is some split structure for accounting within the company, which I will not labour, but is there any way of — just to get my understanding right, there is no actual payment coming out of the Consolidated Fund to AquaGib other than as reflected here?

1365 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, in some years, there has had to be a payment from the Consolidated Fund. I remember that was the case many years ago. In other years, there is not a payment because in the amount that the company collects, the Government gives its share back into the company for the purposes of subsidising the production of water.

Madam Chair: Head 27 stands part of the Bill.

1370 **Clerk:** Head 28, Port; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 28 stands part of the Bill.

1375 **Clerk:** Head 29, Maritime Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I take the Minister to 2(15) which is Contributions to GDC Staff Services and there is a significant increase there? Can she explain what the reason is?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, the £7,000 increase?

1380 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, sorry, there was an actual expenditure of £76,000, then it became an estimated £146,000 and then forecast out and it stayed at that level. I just wanted to understand why the increase?

1385 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** The number of staff went up, Madam Chair. It is a GDC contribution.

Madam Chair: Head 29 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 30, Business; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: On the Establishment on Business, do I take it that these are repositioned staff because we have gone from eight to 19? Is it people who were somewhere else and now they have been located under here?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, Madam Speaker, they are relocations.

Madam Chair: Head 30 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 31, Town Planning and Building Control; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1400

Madam Chair: Head 31 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 32, Procurement Office; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 32 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 33, Justice; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Chair, I am at subsection (1)(e) Probation Salaries. The forecast outturn for 2023-24 is £85,000, but the estimate for 2024-25 is £115,000. The complement for Probation has not changed, as far as I can see from the numbers given. What is the reason for that additional?

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Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): It is recruitment, Madam Speaker. Vacancies filled.

Hon. J Ladislaus: At subhead 2, and I am at line 1, General Expenses, the estimate for 2023-24 was £6,000, yet the forecast outturn for 2023-24 is £23,000, which is almost four times as much. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps give some information as to the reason for that?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I am advised by the Financial Secretary that it is to do with reorganisation of expenses within ministries.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: At subhead 2, I am at line 9, Rent and Service Charges. So, from 2022-23 to the forecast outturn at 2023-24, we have noughts in the Book. The estimate for 2024-25 is £183,000. Could the Hon. Minister explain the reason for that?

Hon. N Feetham: This is because of the new officers for the Probation Services.

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Madam Chair: Head 33 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 34, Gibraltar Law Courts; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 34 stands—sorry, did you have—did the hon. Member have a question? I do not know whether you are nodding for me to move on or to ask a question.

Hon. J Ladislaus: No, apologies, it is to ask a question.

1440 I am at subhead 2 and line 17 at Duty Legal Representative Scheme. We had an estimate 2023-24 of £20,000 and yet the forecast outturn for 2023-24 is £5,000. Am I correct in assuming whether that is due to the number of cases that were seen to or is it that perhaps less lawyers are signing up to the scheme?

1445 **Hon. N Feetham:** This is demand-led, Madam Speaker.

Madam Chair: Head 34 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 35, Policing; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1450 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** At subhead 1, I am at line (1)(b)(ii). So I am at Emergency. The estimate for 2023-24 is £50,000. The forecast outturn was £390,000. Could the Hon. Minister please provide a breakdown or some more information as to the reason for the £390,000?

1455 **Hon. N Feetham:** That is investigation-led, Madam Chair.

Hon. J Ladislaus: As to Manning Level Maintenance, we have an estimate of £350,000 and the forecast outturn is £715,000. Could we have some more information as to the reason for the over double of that figure?

1460 **Hon. N Feetham:** Yes, this is as a result of the estimate making provision for a minimum manning level. It is then obviously impacted by what happens on the ground, such as expenses for covering officers for sick leave, things such as Frontier queues, I believe, and crime-led investigations, especially during the weekend.

1465 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, I am at subhead 2 and line 9. So the estimate for 2023-24 was £50,000, yet the forecast outturn for the Motorboats and Launchers — Fuel and Lubricants was £25,000. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether that is because there was less use of the launchers or what is the reason behind that?

1470 **Hon. N Feetham:** Again, Madam Chair, it is demand-led, so less usage means that we have made provision for an estimate to reflect that accordingly.

1475 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Just one further, so I am at head 2 again, at line 23, the 999 Emergency Hotline, the estimate for 2024-25 of £12,000, could the Hon. Minister confirm whether that is a one-off cost for the setting up of that line or is it a recurrent expenditure from here on out?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we are dealing with the recurrent expenditure. We are in the white pages. All of this is recurrent. It is not one-off. One-off is in the I&D.

1480 **Madam Chair:** Head 35 to stand part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 36, Prison; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 36 to stand part of the Bill.

1485

Clerk: Head 37, Income Tax; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, just looking at the complement and it seems to have gone down, as has the salary cost. The Minister has obviously mentioned his recruitment of two

1490 individuals. I was wondering whether the Minister can advise whether that is actually reflected in
the salary numbers and the complement.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, this is a point I made earlier in relation to Personnel and
Development Department. The hon. Gentleman will see that there are three supernumerary staff
1495 referred to in the context of the complement, and as I told the House earlier, all of the
supernumerary staff are being moved from there to the Personnel and Development Department.
I will allow the Hon. Mr Feetham to speak about the recruitments but, as I understand it, those
are contractual recruitments not reflected here. They are not civil service recruitments. The figure
1500 that affects this number is the explanation I gave earlier about the supernumerary staff. The
hon. Gentleman should have seen it there. It is the £65,000 going down to £62,000, because those
three supernumerary staff have moved to the Personal and Development head.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Chair, I did not know whether the Minister was going to say
anything. The Chief Minister seemed to suggest that these were not civil servants. Is that the case?
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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, these are civil servants. The three supernumerary staff
are civil servants. They are moved to where all Civil Service supernumerary staff now are, which
is the Personnel and Development head. But they stay in the Departments in which they were.
They have not been lost to the Department. They are just booked because they are
1510 supernumerary. They are booked under the Personnel and Development head. That is what I
explained to the House earlier when I was dealing with the Personnel and Development head.

The question the hon. Gentleman asked was about the recruitments that have been
announced by the Hon. Minister, and what the Hon. Minister has already informed the House
about is that they are recruited on contract, which means they are not civil servants.
1515

Madam Chair: Anything further from the Hon. Mr Clinton?

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes. Madam Chair, just for the sake perhaps of my memory and for new
Members of the House, can the Chief Minister explain exactly what is the difference between
1520 supernumerary staff and a normal civil servant within a head of establishment for the
Department?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, there is no difference between an individual who is
supernumerary and an individual who is in the complement. They are all civil servants.
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Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chairman, so why would two individuals who work exclusively, I
assume — I am happy to be corrected— for the Income Tax Office and not be within the
establishment of the Income Tax Office. I fail to see the logic.

Hon. Chief Minister: Because, Madam Speaker, as I explained when I was dealing with the
Human Resources Department this year, now Personnel and Development Department, and
indeed I think in other years when I have also explained this point, where individuals are
supernumerary and there are very many reasons why an individual may be supernumerary, they
may be there for a short-term period.
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The Income Tax Department may have asked to do an exercise and they may require three AOs
for 36 months, for example; or three EOs for 36 months. Traditionally, there was a view that you
sometimes put those supernumerary staff in the Department. If you do that, Madam Speaker, you
will lose control of how many supernumerary staff you have. How would we quickly be able to see
that we have at least three supernumerary executive officers? When there is an EO vacancy
1535 somewhere else, if you do not know that you have an EO supernumerary, you might go out and
do a promotion round, when in fact you have got somebody who is supernumerary, and because
1540

they are already EO, they should take the post in complement so that they are secure in their EO post. That is the reason it has been done. It has got nothing to do with them being a different class of civil servant. It is just about where they are in that period and keeping control of those numbers.

1545 I hope that is clear enough for the hon. Gentleman.

Madam Chair: Nothing further? Head 37 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 38, Financial Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 38 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 39, Gambling Division; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

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Madam Chair: Head 39 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 40, Postal Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1560 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** There, Madam Speaker, I just wanted a clarification. Rather than clarification, it is clear from the establishment figures on page 124 that there has been an increase there of post-delivery persons. Perhaps the Minister could indicate, was that because there were vacancies there or because they decided that the service needed more people at that level?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Chair, this is the deal that was done with the unions.

1565

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, what deal was done with the unions? I am not following.

1570 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, there were a number of individuals here who had been employed long term as temporary staff, and the agreement with the union was that they would, from memory, because it was a previous Minister, that they would be brought into the complement and they would then be able to fill the posts of post-delivery person as those became available in the complement.

So what hon. Members will see is that in the coming years, the supernumerary number will go down as they become subsumed in the post-delivery person complement of 22, which there is here.

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1580 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, so those people which are currently booked as supernumerary post-delivery persons, those nine, in forthcoming years will be reflected higher up along the line as post-delivery person but above the supernumerary heading. But if that is the agreement, why has it not happened already? Is there like an agreement to transition people over a period of time?

1585 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker. It is that the complement of post-delivery personnel currently stands at 22, and as those retire or leave to other posts, then those who are supernumerary will no longer be supernumerary. The number of supernumerary individuals will be reduced because as you have more of the vacancies available at the top, the number that are supernumerary is 22 — sorry, will be less than 9 because the 22 will stay current.

So they are supernumerary because we have 9 more than the numeral 22. As the 22 start to make way, the 9 will reduce.

1590 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But let me talk about the practicalities. At the moment, there are 22 — the establishment of post-delivery persons is 22 and those positions, I assume, are filled. Added to the supernumerary, you have got 31 post-delivery persons who are actually available to the Director of Postal Services to deliver mail. Given the Hon. Chief Minister's answer, it is suggestive

1595 that the establishment is not going to change but the supernumerary number will be reduced gradually. But is he suggesting that the delivery of mail can be done with less personnel?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, because the new personnel have different timings to the old personnel.

1600 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, just for the sake of my sanity, can the Chief Minister explain the difference between the supernumerary staff showing an establishment on the Postal Services, and the conversation we just had about the supernumerary staff for Tax Office. Why is it that here they appear, and yet in the Tax Office they do not? What is the logic?

1605 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, because Postal Services is different, and these grades are not transferable. So a post-delivery person is not an AA, an AO, an EO, or HEO, etc. They are employed to provide services only in this Department. There are no post-delivery persons in any other Department which the Personnel and Development Department could deploy them to in the event that they were to run out of work in one particular Department. They are not
1610 supernumerary for the purposes of the whole of the Civil Service. These are very specifically supernumerary only to this Department. I do hope that does not help the hon. Gentleman's sanity.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, as we increasingly get on, my sanity is definitely going out the window, if we had windows. But, Madam Chair, does he not appreciate that what he has just
1615 said defies logic because the two individuals — going back to the Tax Office — who are specialists in transfer pricing, etc., as the Hon. Minister has explained on several occasions, are hardly the sorts of individuals you transfer to any other Government Department? Does the Chief Minister just not see that?

1620 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Sorry, the hon. Gentleman says that an EO from the Income Tax Department is not transferable to another Department; is that the question?

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chairman, if the two individuals recruited by a Tax Office who are specialists in transfer pricing have been given a grade, and I am not familiar what grade they have
1625 given, if they are now saying that they are at the discretion of the Government transferable to, for example, the transport section, I am sure they will be delighted.

Hon. Chief Minister: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. Ecstatic, no doubt. However, they would not be the people that we are talking about because we have not discussed those people. I told the
1630 hon. Gentleman that those people had been recruited on contract. They are in the GDC, they are not in these white pages, but it appears that his sanity just cannot get around this.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, so now we hear they are not civil servants, they are GDC contract employees.
1635

Hon. Chief Minister: Not now, Madam Speaker. I have told him during the course of my intervention this morning, the Minister has told this House on a number of occasions and I think in the public statements that we have made. I specifically said these are not the people who the
1640 hon. Member has talked about as the contracted individuals who are being brought into the Income Tax Department.

If the hon. Gentleman listens to everything that is being said, it might actually be very good for his sanity, Madam Chair.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just return to the logic of this; the logic argument? I think the answer
1645 that the Chief Minister gave to my hon Colleague is that the logic for doing it this way, the

1650 supernumerary staff in this area, in Postal Services, is because there are no post-delivery persons anywhere else. But if we were to turn back to page 39, booked under Personnel and Development as supernumerary staff, you have got, for example, a leading firefighter or a Deputy Director of Nursing Services. There are no leading firefighters anywhere else. So why would you not put the postal delivery persons there as well? In the same argument, it would not be that there are no other postal delivery persons, there are no leading firefighters in any other Department, and yet that person is not booked in the fire brigade part.

1655 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Because that is the grade that they have, Madam Speaker, but they are not working in the Departments which those grades relate to. They are working in other grades because, for reasons which I would assume the hon. Gentleman would be aware of, they have had to be moved out of those Departments and they are working in other Departments but they have kept their grades.

1660 But to keep them in view, they are there so that we can always remember that they are there. That does not affect the logic of this particular Department having its supernumerary staff there because there is a reason specific to that Department why they should be there.

1665 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So to understand that logic then, the hon. Member is saying that if I look at the table on page 30, every person on that list under supernumerary is not in the Department which you would think they are if you looked at the title of the job? That is right. So the Education and Training Policy Adviser is not in Education. Have I understood his answer?

1670 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, that is not exactly the case, because personnel across the board in Government is not a syllogism. Because it is not a syllogism, the hon. Gentleman cannot make that comparison.

1675 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** With respect, I was not making that comparison. He suggested in his answer that the difference in the logic was that when it comes to post-delivery persons, they are booked here and different to the firefighter because the post-delivery persons are in the Department. He suggested that everyone in 30 was not in the Department. That is why I was seeking his confirmation. It appears that that is not the logic either. I am trying to understand why they are booked in different ways.

1680 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That is the logic, Madam Speaker, but it is not logic which is syllogistic. That is what I am explaining to the hon. Gentleman. If he wants to insist on it being syllogistic, the answer is it is not syllogistic.

1685 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am sorry, Madam Speaker, but it is — either the answer is everyone on page 30 is not in the Department and that is the logic or it is not but what he cannot do is give the answer that it is both.

1690 **Hon. Chief Minister:** In some instances it might be neither, Madam Speaker, because the hon. Gentleman should be reminded of the classic syllogism elephants have ears, Socrates has ears, Socrates is an elephant. No, Madam Speaker, that is not the position.

Madam Chair: Head 40 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 41, Equality; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1695 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Chair, can the Hon. Minister clarify what Shop Mobility is exactly, please?

1700 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Shop Mobility is something I have been informed that started during your time when you were in office. It is services to provide repairs to mobility scooters.

1705 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I can see from the Book — the three Books that I have here, that as far as I can see it goes back to at least 2019 and the sum is always £48,000. Am I right to assume that this is some type of services contract and, if so, can the hon. Member confirm, does he have the information as to what private entity it is and whether it has always been the same private entity?

1710 **Hon. C P Santos:** It is a services contract, the name of the company — I can check and let you know because I do not know exactly what the name — I believe it is service — I will let you know because I do not know the name of the actual company. As far as I am aware, I can check but I think it has been the same company.

1715 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am conscious that we have now been in Committee for two and a half hours and some of us have the liberty of moving in and out of the House, others do not. I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment to break for 15 minutes.

Madam Chair: We will recess for 15 minutes and I will come back to the Hon. Mr Origo.

The House recessed at 12 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 12.15 p.m.

**A Bill for an Act to Appropriate Sums of Money to the service of the
year ending on 31st day of March 2025—
Clauses considered —
Continued**

1720 **Madam Chair:** Yes, the Hon. Mr Origo wanted to speak.

Hon. G Origo: Thank you, Madam Chair.

1725 At part 2, subsection (6) on Rents and Service Charges, I note that the last year's outturn was £233,000 but this year's was £190,000. In my experience, rents and service charges have been increasing, so I wanted to ask the reason for this downturn in the expenses. Has the premises for equality moved or can the Minister please explain?

1730 **Hon. C P Santos:** Yes, with the change of ministerial portfolios the offices have changed and we have also got extra offices because we have taken in the supported needs and disabilities office. So that is where the difference in rental and service charge is.

Hon. G Origo: Thank you to the Minister.

1735 Madam Chair, could I ask with respect to part 2, subsection (8), Marriage Counselling, it seems to be a fixed expense of £12,000 a year. Can I ask the Hon. Minister if this is demand led or whether this is just a fixed salary expense given to the marriage counsellor?

Hon. C P Santos: From what I understand, this is also something that you originated when the GSD was in office, but this is a contractual amount, an annual figure of £12,000 for marriage counselling.

1740 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, with respect to part 2, subsection (9), Equality, can the Hon. Minister please explain what this expense includes? It appears to be a quite stable, static £90,000, £100,000 a year. Can he explain what are the heads that fall under this?

1745 **Hon. C P Santos:** Equality is all the different projects that are worked on from the Department itself, the Department for Equality, but now it is also split between the Supported Needs and Disability Office and the Ministry of Equality itself, so any campaigns or anything that we choose to do from the Ministry.

1750 **Hon. G Origo:** Finally, Madam Chair, could the Hon. Minister please confirm on part 2, subsection (12), in relation to contribution to the GDC staff services, is it £296,000 estimate with respect to the salaries of the five GDC employees which were going to be employed next year?

1755 **Hon. C P Santos:** This is correct. The contribution to GDC is the new staff. As I said, we have already taken in the supported needs and disabilities officers as well as supported employment so this is the extra staff that we have at the Ministry.

Madam Chair: Head 41 stands part of the Bill.

1760 **Clerk:** Head 42, Employment; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, on Other Charges, to line 7, Rents and Service Charges, £29,000 outturn for 2023-24, and a £94,000 estimate for 2024-25. I would be interested to know why.

1765 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Chair, the extra – the increase of £73,000 includes the cost of unit 78 at New Harbours. This was previously at another head, in head 24, Economic Development, and its newly acquired offices for the Employment Tribunal as well in Europort.

Madam Chair: Head 42 stands part of the Bill.

1770 **Clerk:** Head 43, Culture; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1775 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, could the Hon. Minister please explain at part 2, subsection (14) what the expense estimated for next year with respect to Elite Funding, marked at £10,000, relates to?

1780 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Chair, Elite Funding is a new head. It is an extra support, financial support, for people going into vocational training over and above what is already given under the educational scholarship as these are private – some are private institutions and the tuition fees are sometimes more expensive so we want to give an option to those getting into that type of educational training.

Madam Chair: Head 43 stands part of the Bill.

1785 **Clerk:** Head 44, Tourism; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1790 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, could the Hon. Minister please explain the reason for the savings, if we could call it, in relation to marketing at part 2, subsection (13)? We had estimated £700,000 in expenses but this came out to £615,000. Have we slowed down on marketing efforts with respect to tourism?

1795 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Chair, it is not that we have slowed down doing marketing but we are using different marketing strategies. There are things that do not necessarily need physical – someone to physically be there. It can be via advertising and digital advertising, so we are trying to streamline the costs of this. If you look back at 2022-23 it was only an expense of £300,000. Last year we went up to £615,000 and we are trying to streamline, so making a saving but not necessarily by marketing the product less.

1800 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, if I can turn to subhead 2, line 17, Information Officers, Contracted Services, the estimate for last year was zero and it came in at £107,000. This year, for 2024-25, we have £198,000. What is this in relation to and who is the contract with?

1805 **Hon. C P Santos:** We noticed last year that we needed some extra support with regards to information officers. This is not just with regards to the coach park and the terminals. This is also extra help that we have on the Upper Rock with regards to helping traffic management. The £107,000 is a pro rata of the £198,000 that are contracted for five information officers. I would need to check who the contract is with exactly, but that is why the difference between £107,000 and £198,000. One is pro rata and one is for the full 12 months.

1810 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, I am grateful for the answer.
So we would imply there is some sort of long-term contract in place going ahead and, if so, does the Minister have any information as to the contract? I am surprised he does not know who the contractor is.

1815 **Hon. C P Santos:** I needed to double check but the supplier is JT Security and – yes, I need to check the length of the contract but it is – I need to check the length of the contract. I am unsure of that now.

1820 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Minister for that.
So these five labelled information officers, they seem to be doing varied sorts of duties. Are they, just for the sake of understanding their role, there to assist tourists, giving them information as to tourist sites and other information, or are they really about traffic management?

1825 **Hon. C P Santos:** The contract is a supply services agreement. I have the person that does the information – the information officer just does information officer duties as and when required, and then whenever we need the extra support on the Upper Rock when we have a lot of cruise liners, it is a different set of people that come. So it is not the same person that comes that is a tourist information officer that does that, too. So the contract is to supply services. So, for example, we have up to five people within our contract, so if we need extra support we do not use the same tourist information officers to do the traffic management on the Upper Rock.

1835 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So, Madam Chair, this is my last question on the point, really.
So these are not actually individuals that have any particular skillset in terms of knowledge of the tourism product or that type of information or history or heritage, these are just basically security officers?

1840 **Hon. C P Santos:** No, that is incorrect. We have the information officers. We have three currently who are permanently with us, and they get trained up to be information officers and know the tourism product and go through the tour guide training. Then we have up to two other people who we choose, who we call upon as traffic management within the Upper Rock when necessary. But those people do not necessarily need to know the tourist product. They are there to help the overspill of having 6,000 passengers on a cruise ship. But the information officers are just exclusively information officers and they are trained up to be so.

1845 **Madam Chair:** Head 44 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 45, Youth; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1850 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Chair, I see on the establishment of youth there are two members of staff are classified as industrial staff. Can the Minister – because I take it all the others are what we generally call the youth workers and so on. What are the industrial staff?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Chair, if I am correct the industrial staff would be the caretaker and the cleaner.

1855 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Yes, because there is a separate expenditure for cleaning, so there is cleaning services, so I do not know, we either contract out the cleaning services or we have a cleaner.

1860 **Hon. C P Santos:** The youth service has many different premises so the one cleaner cannot clean all youth clubs as well as the premises and the offices. So I think we – am I correct in thinking we also outsource cleaning to some other clubs because there a lot of different clubs and offices and stuff? So we have a full-time cleaner with us and then we outsource whenever necessary.

1865 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, could the Hon. Minister explain what types of expenses are put under the head in part 2, subsections (6) and (7), Youth Activities and Youth Grants, both coming in at a respective £40,000 and £39,000?

1870 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Chair, with regards to number (6), Youth Activities is different outings or different events that are organised by each youth club in order to provide activities that are outside of the remit of the actual youth centre itself, and that is subdivided by all youth clubs. Then in subhead (7), Youth Grants is money that is given to four different organisations that provide services outside the service itself. So they apply for a youth grant. This is cub scouts, I think St John's Ambulance and Duke of Edinburgh.

1875 **Madam Chair:** Head 45 to stand part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 46, Drug and Alcohol Awareness and Rehabilitation Services; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1880 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, section 2, line 13, on Drug Awareness, the estimate for both 2022-23 and 2023-24 was £30,000 but the actual figure for 2022-23 comes back at zero and the forecast outturn for 2023-24 is also zero. Is there a specific reason why no money seems to have been spent on drug awareness by the Drugs and Alcohol Awareness Rehabilitation Service?

1885 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Chair, the drug awareness – this is one thing I questioned when I first got into office. It may seem that it is a promotional campaign for drug awareness. It was actually a programme to send people to overseas rehabs if necessary. We found that the services already offered in Gibraltar are enough and we have not sent anyone overseas, so that is why we have gone down to a nominal amount of £1,000.

1890 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Line 20, Secondments; the actual for 2023 on secondments was just over half a million pounds and the forecast outturn for 2023-24 is £625,000. Could the Hon. Minister clarify what these secondments are?

1895 **Hon. C P Santos:** The staffing is now – comes under a secondment from the Care Agency, so it
comes under secondment because we pay it as opposed to the Care Agency paying it and us
getting them as a secondment. We actually take on those salaries ourselves. So the difference is
1900 because in the past year we realised we needed a little bit more staff because as it is demand led
we do not know how many people are going to be at Bruce’s Farm itself. So the estimate is still
the same as it was in 2023-24 and that is why we – that is the difference.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Hon. Minister clarify whether these secondments have anything to
do with the fact that the staff complement of the aforementioned Department is now standing at
1905 zero?

Hon. C P Santos: We took over – well, the Care Agency took over the drugs – well, Bruce’s Farm
and the DARS programme as from 2021. So there used to be a Department of one person that
used to work for the admin side. We do not require that person anymore so that person has been
1910 moved into another Department. I am not quite sure where that person has been moved to, but
the secondment is with regards to the management and the staffing by Care Agency staff.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Hon. Minister clarify what relief cover constitutes exactly? Because
the actual expenditure for 2022-23 was just over a quarter of a million pounds and the forecast
1915 outturn for 2023-24 is almost £2,000. Could he elaborate on what relief cover is exactly?

Hon. C P Santos: The forecast outturn ended up being £196,000 last year with an estimate of
£200,000 this year. The relief cover is cover for one to ones, whenever someone needs to go on
suicide watch or someone has some further issues that they need one-to-one care, and that we
1920 can only estimate what the issues that will arise will be.

Madam Chair: Head 46 to stand part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 47, Housing; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1925 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

Can I ask on the – this is 2(20) on Incidental Estate Security where there is an actual cost of
130, which last year is – the outturn is 390 and there is a notional provision. I assume, but I am
asking the Minister to confirm, that this is the cost of the security that was rolled out in certain
estates as a pilot project. Is the fact that they have a notional cost for this year reflective that that
1930 scheme may not continue or –

Minister for Housing and the University (Hon. P A Orfila): We have had problems in the past
– sorry, Madam Chair. We have had problems in the past with evictions, etc., and so that is why
we have such a high elevated figure. Hopefully, that is a nominal £1,000 we may not use as much
1935 as we need. It is there in case.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see. So there is not a fixed decision, policy decision, yet in relation to
extending those arrangements and I assume by the Minister’s answer that there is no contract in
place to continue that? These are *ad hoc* arrangements which are used whenever the Department
1940 has a requirement in certain estate; is that right?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Chair, that is correct.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask in relation to the same item, given that there was an actual
1945 expenditure of around £130,000, did that all go to the same company or does the – sorry. (**A
Member:** 390.) No, no, actual expenditure of 2022-23 of £130,000 and then there is a forecast

outturn, as my colleague has rightly mentioned, of 390 for 2023-24. Have those sums gone to the same entity and, if so, is she able to reveal which entity?

1950 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Madam Chair, I would have to check those and see exactly whether we used more or not.

Hon. D J Bossino: I suppose I can either communicate separately with the hon. Member or, alternatively, file a formal Question in the next session of the House.

1955

Madam Chair: Head 47 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 48, University of Gibraltar; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1960

Madam Chair: Head 48 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 49, Fire and Rescue Service; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1965 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, I am at subheading 2, line 5. I note that the estimate for 2023-24 was £25,000. The forecast outturn was £46,000. I wonder whether the Hon. Minister could shed some light as to the reason for this outturn.

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam Speaker, it is demand led.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that answer. I understand that it may be demand led, but perhaps he could shed some light as to whether, for example, it could be that one of the appliances broke down, needed maintenance or –

1975

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, we do not have the details here.

Madam Chair: Head 49 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 50, Airport, Fire and Rescue Service; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1980

Madam Chair: Head 50 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 51, Civil Contingency; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

1985 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** At head 1, I am at (d), Employees' Pension Contributions. The forecast outturn for 2023-24 is £9,000. The estimate for 2023-24 was the £9,000 as well and the actual 2022-23 was close to the £9,000. Why, therefore, do we now have an estimate of zero for 2024-25?

1990 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, the contributory scheme member is no longer there. He has retired.

1995 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Just one further question. At subhead 2, I am at line 12, weather transmission reports. Those came under – sorry, they came to £3,000 as a 2023-24 estimate. The forecast outturn was more than double and we now see an estimate of £10,000. Could the Hon. Minister provide some information as to the reason for the increase in those?

Madam Chair: Madam Speaker, we had to contract the services of a new service provider and hence the increase.

2000 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, if I may, at part 1, subsection (1)(a) on Salaries, I note that the
outturn is £132,000 for this year but the estimate for next year is £53,000, yet in terms of the
complement of staff there are no changes. Can the Hon. Minister please explain the difference in
the £80,000 in salary so we can see?

2005 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, the salaries is less because of retirement of a member of staff
who was seconded to a different Department.

Madam Chair: Head 51 stands part of the Bill.

2010 **Clerk:** Head 52, Sport and Leisure; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Chair, on subhead 1(1), the Personal Emoluments, the salaries bill
seems to go up by £20,000, yet on the establishment we have a reduction of two members of
staff. So we have two members of staff less but yet a £20,000 increase in the salaries on
subhead 1(1).

2015 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, I am informed that is because of vacancies that were available
and have been filled.

2020 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Okay. So if I then take you to subhead 2(6), the contribution to the GDC in
respect of staff services, we have increased the complement there by three but yet we have
increased the forecast or the expenditure as compared to the forecast by quasi £200,000. That
seems a quite high remuneration for three members of staff.

2025 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, the complement of staff has risen simply because the
Industrial Relations Team have moved into the same head.

2030 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I think the Minister is trying to explain that the industrial relations staff may
have moved in. I am querying that it is an extra £180,000 for a token – or not for a token, for three
extra people. It seems very high wages. I do not know if it is that or not.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, the GDC grades are high grades. Sorry, senior grades.

2035 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, in subhead 2(7), for the Europa Point Sports Complex, the
half a million pounds there, can we have some indication where – what exactly does that half a
million go towards?

Hon. L M Bruzon: Madam Speaker, those half a million pounds go towards the maintenance
and running of the facilities.

2040 **Madam Chair:** Head 52 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 53, Gibraltar Audit Office; subhead 1, Payroll; subhead 2, Other Charges.

Madam Chair: Head 53 stands part of the Bill. Clause 2 stands part of the Bill.

2045 **Clerk:** Clause 3.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chair, if I may on this one, I do not know if we are coming to the
actual detail of it or we are just going straight to it. But Contributions of Government-Owned
Companies, zero, 2023-24, and the estimate 2024-25, £1,000 notional amount. I was wondering

2050 whether the Government is considering whether the companies will require any level of support or not in 2024-25.

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker. We will consider that issue as the year progresses.

2055 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Given that in 2023-24 there was no actual contribution but rather an advance of £27.6 million, is it the Government's understanding that £27.6 million will be repaid to the Consolidated Fund by the companies?

2060 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, we are going to consider following exactly the model of repayment that was in place when we were elected, which will enable us to see whether that repayment is made during the course of this financial year or another, which was the model that hon. Members must have considered was the appropriate and correct one, given that it is the one that we inherited.

2065 **Madam Chair:** Head 55 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 56, Transfer from Government Surplus; subhead 1, Payment to Social Assistance Fund — Import Duty — Transfer from Government Surplus.

2070 **Madam Chair:** Head 56 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 57, Contribution to the Improvement and Development Fund, subhead 1, Contribution to the Improvement and Development Fund.

2075 **Madam Chair:** Head 57 stands part of the Bill. Clause 3 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Clause 4; head 58, Exceptional Expenditure; subhead 1, Ex-Commissioner Special Inquiry.

2080 **Madam Chair:** Head 58 stands part of the Bill. Clause 4 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Clause 5; head 54, Supplementary Provision; subhead 1, Supplementary Funding.

Madam Chair: Head 54 stands part of the Bill. Clause 5 stands part of the Bill.

2085 **Clerk:** Clause 6, Improvement and Development Fund; head 101, Works and Equipment; subhead 1, Works and Equipment.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Chair, the subhead 1(m), the Contribution to the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority of £170,000, is in respect of what particular work or equipment?

2090 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I am reminded by the Financial Secretary that that is the figure that actually appears on the Green Pages for the GSLA and that relates to the amount for maintenance of children's parks.

2095 **Madam Chair:** Head 101 stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 102, Projects; subhead 1, Roads and Parking Projects.

2100 **Hon. D J Bossino:** On 101, I am slightly confused. So it is 1(k) Contribution to the Gibraltar Port Authority?

Madam Chair: We will go back exceptionally but if you have a question let me know. I am looking at the Opposition all the time. Where is your question on head 101?

2105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I think it is the – yes, letter (k), and I just wanted to understand why – what the expenditure, estimated expenditure, of £400,000 related to. It seems to go back to the estimate of 2023-24 but then a focused outturn for 2023-24 drops to £50,000. I just wanted to – if the Minister could explain why that movement.

2110 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, it is mainly in relation to VTS requirements and IT upgrades in relation to the VTS services.

Hon. D J Bossino: So she says ‘mainly’? Was that the answer? I did not quite catch it.

2115 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Yes, Madam Speaker. It is in relation to the VTS upgrades.

2120 **Hon. D J Bossino:** If I may, in the next line, (l), contribution to Housing Works Agency, where there is a significant increase from £2 million to round about £6 million from 2023-24 estimates and forecast outturn for that year, and then it drops to £2.9 million. Could I also have an explanation as to why the movement in those numbers and what those relate to?

Hon. P A Orfila: £6 million was to repair the – Madam Chair. It was to repair the housing stock and this year we envisage £2.9 million, not thousand.

2125 **Madam Chair:** Head 101 to stand part of the Bill.

Clerk: Head 102, Projects; subhead 1, Roads and Parking Projects.

2130 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask on 1(a)(i), that is the cost there of £3 million over the estimates, is that related to the Kingsway Tunnel project or some other project?

2135 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, that is not just the tunnel, because I think the tunnel is provided for elsewhere. This is approach works in relation to the tunnel, so changes of traffic flow roundabout and the ancillary works done around there.

Madam Chair: Anything else on 102?

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Chair, on –

2140 **Madam Chair:** Subhead 1, yes.

Clerk: Subhead 2, Relocation Costs.

2145 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Can I just ask, Madam Chair, whether the effectively Project Euston has come to an end?

Hon. Chief Minister: As I understand it, Madam Speaker.

2150 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Under the same subhead but item – oh, sorry, that is a different subhead.

Clerk: Subhead 3, Reclamation Projections.

2155 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I apologise for jumping the gun. Because it is not emboldened, with my eyesight I thought it was part of the other head. Can I ask on reclamation projects what the £1.2 million went to last year and what the proposal is to – for the £400,000 this year?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think that is principally Victoria Keys coastal protection work and also other studies for other reclamations, potential reclamations.

2160 **Madam Chair:** Anything else?

Clerk: Subhead 4, Other Projects.

2165 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So (p), which is Infrastructure Provision for Housing Projects, what does that relate to?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, that relates to infrastructure provision for housing projects.

2170 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Can the hon. Member be more specific? He knows I can read, I think, and that has prompted me to ask the question to request from him further particulars.

2175 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the housing projects that he knows at the moment are Hassan Centenary Terraces, Chatham Views and Bob Peliza, so the infrastructure provision for those.

2180 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Okay. We are getting somewhere. In relation to that, can he – given his answer, is he excluding any works in relation to, for example, Road to the Lines? Is that not covered by this expenditure?

2185 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I am delighted, Madam Speaker, that we are getting to the place where the hon. Gentleman remembers what the housing projects are and that, therefore, he has been able to connect the words ‘infrastructure provision’ with the words ‘housing project’ and work out that which is in the public domain and is reflected in the Book. This has not got anything to do with Road to the Lines, Madam Speaker. The answer that he got in the last House tells him that it would not be here.

2190 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask on (r), which is Infrastructure Provision for New Developments, what is within the scope of the new developments part? So, for example, at £2.1 million spent last year, towards which in particular? The estimate for next year would go for what particular project?

2195 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think this is almost exclusively in respect of the Government’s obligations in relation to the Eastside project; that is to say the provision of services to the border of the plot, from memory.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Chair, in subhead 4, zulu whiskey, there is the Upgrade of Playgrounds for £100,000. What is the difference between that and the previous section that was answered before that was in respect of playgrounds? Why are they two different sections?

2200 **Hon. Chief Minister:** One is maintenance, Madam Chair, and the other one is upgrade of playgrounds, which is different. So when you are maintaining, you are spending money maintaining the piece of kit that is there. When you are upgrading, you are changing the pieces of kit. So this would be new pieces of kit. I wish him bravo zulu for the rest of the afternoon.

2205 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Yes, if I understood correctly, one is just maintaining and the upgrade will probably cater for my latest pet love for shaded areas in playgrounds and so on? That would be an upgrade and I wish the Minister well in achieving that.

2210 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, it is their job to try and put us in the shade, but we will try to avoid that.

Madam Chair: Anything else on subhead 4? Yes, the Hon. Mr Origo.

2215 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Chair, if I may go back to subsection (w) on part 4, Sewage Pumping Stations, subsection (2) and subsection (3), Western Beach and Europa Point, these were estimated to attract £725,000 and £425,000, yet the forecast outturn is zero and in the other instance £85,000. Is it the Government's intention to proceed with the sewage pumping station works that it was proposing to do next year?

2220 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the answer is that we will be proceeding with those projects or other projects for those purposes. There is no question of not proceeding if the hon. Gentleman is talking about the sewage treatment works. The waste treatment facilities above these pumping stations require more or less work depending on the state that they are in. Those two are not and should not be read to be linked. Hardly the most glamorous part of the
2225 Book for us to linger over, but I hope that explanation assists.

Hon. D J Bossino: What is envisaged in terms of the expected expenditure of half a million pounds under (zn)? It refers to, and I can read, the Traffic Plan, if I can say it in short, but are the hon. Members able to provide further information in relation to what it is expected to cover?
2230

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Chair, this is for work on the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan. Madam Chair, I gave information on that in my Budget speech and I also have done in the previous session in relation to cycling lanes in answer to questions, so that information has already been answered here.
2235

Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to – sorry, just trying to get the line right – (zs), which refers to the Gibraltar Development Plan and there is a figure of £260,000, given that we have information as to what the tender amount is, which is in excess of £600,000, is it the idea that that is going to be spread out over a number of years?
2240

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, Madam Speaker, the contract to be entered into will be spread over the 24-month period.

Madam Chair: Anything else on subhead 4?

2245 **Clerk:** Subhead 5, Equity Funding/Funding.

Hon. R M Clinton: Yes, Madam Chair.
2250 Could the Government give us an analysis as to where the £10 million that was spent in 2023-24 went by way of equity funding/funding to Government-owned companies and also where the envisaged £10 million will go for 2024-25?

Hon. Chief Minister: Of course, Madam Speaker. Gibraltar Investment Holdings.

2255 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So that would be the entirety for both years?

2260 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, my memory is not as good as it used to be, just like the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition's eyesight, and mine I hasten to add, but I think I have confirmed this to the hon. Gentleman actually last year. So I am reconfirming something which is now public because I said it last year, and is in the *Hansard*, and the year before and the year before.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Chairman, for the sake of the record that may be the case in previous years. It does not necessarily mean it will be the same this year.

2265 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, for the sake of the record, that is why I answered, but when the hon. Gentleman asked me about last year I gave him the answer that I had given him the answer last year and the year before and the year before. I was not suggesting that that should be something that he, therefore, could not ask me about at the Committee stage because it was public and that is why I gave him the answer. My reference to the *Hansard* is about the previous
2270 year when I had already given the answer.

Madam Chair: Anything else on subhead 5? Let's move on.

2275 **Clerk:** Subhead 6, Brexit Measures.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: It is a generic point, really, on that. Am I to understand these are not all the measures that will be taken in the event – these are not measures in the event of an agreement, are they? Because they are measures being taken irrespective of whether or not there is an agreement? Because I did notice earlier in the – in subhead 4 that there is still a provision,
2280 for example, to the UK European Treaty Joint Facility, so I am assuming that this is not an all-inclusive head or is a head that is irrespective of the other matters. Perhaps the Government can comment on that.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, six is more about NNO but not just about NNO because
2285 the works to the Frontier pedestrian entry point will be done whether we have an NNO or whether we have an NO. But Item C, for example, there is more an NNO point.

Madam Chair: Head 102 stands part of the Bill. Clause 6 stands part of the Bill.

2290 **Clerk:** Clauses 7 and 8, appendix B, Gibraltar Development Corporation.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: There, Madam Speaker, we notice a significant increase in the establishment there of the GDC. I am not familiar, or at least I am certainly not familiar now – I may have been familiar with the entry points if they have not changed since my time in my office
2295 but I am not familiar with what a grade 2, grade 3, grade 4 under the current form is. So I was just wondering, because I noticed that the increases are primarily at grade 2, 3 and 4. What is that in terms of the kind of recruitment that the Government is doing?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, those grades are now more or less equivalent to the equivalent strata in the Civil Service, if that is of assistance to the hon. Gentleman.
2300

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So something like an AO, EO upwards, HEO, something like that?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes. So grade 1 AA, grade 2 AO, grade 3 EO, grade 4 HEO, grade 5 SEO,
2305 more or less.

2310 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chairman, on page 176 of appendix B, line 19, Contribution to Economic Development and Employment Company Ltd came in at £11,782,000 for 2023-24 and estimated the same for 2024-25. Can the Government advise what this entity does for £11.7 million?

2315 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** There are two elements in the EDEC. The EDEC is the parent of the training companies and that is the bulk of where we have had – that has been there since 2012 when we first put the £11 million in order to take in the 1,000 unemployed that there was at that time. We keep giving that explanation every year. So the unemployment level is where it is because there are a lot of people in training and this is where the training companies are financed from. In addition to that, EDEC also provides some element of support where we are doing things in terms of economic development which will generate employment and where there are trainings involved.

2320 **Madam Chair:** Anything else on appendix B?

Clerk: Appendix D, Borders and Coastguard Agency.

2325 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Chair, can I ask on (20), which is Security Services, that can perhaps the Minister explain what that sum is payable to? What is it in respect of? Borders and Coastguard man entry points, so why is there a need to pay a sum for security services? I am not sure I understand that.

2330 **Hon. Chief Minister:** That is the cost of airport security, Madam Speaker, the security of the Air Terminal.

2335 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chairman, on line 17 there is something has occurred this year, Leasing Agreements, Contracted Services. There was no provision for it last year but it came in at £15,000 and for 2024-25 it is estimated at £19,000. I would be grateful for some explanation.

Hon. Chief Minister: Those are the leasing agreements for two vehicles, Madam Speaker.

2340 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask on the Professional Fees item, which is 21, again I am not sure why there is a professional fees part of the budget of the Borders and Coastguard Agency and what that could be, so I would be grateful for some information there.

Hon. Chief Minister: Accountancy fees, Madam Speaker.

2345 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chairman, could the Chief Minister elaborate when he says accountancy fees? Are these audit fees or consultancy fees of some sort or system design fees?

2350 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I think that they are consultancy fees because there is an accountant seconded, or not seconded, employed now, to provide services in the Borders and Coastguard Agency and this is the cost.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Madam Chairman, is this in relation to new software or is it just in relation to financial control *per se*?

2355 **Hon. Chief Minister:** The latter, not the former.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So can I ask on that, so if this is an accountant presumably seconded from the private sector, is this a specific time arrangement or – because at the cost envisaged it might be cheaper to open a post and recruit for someone in the service?

2360 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, because the service is not just limited to financial control. There will be services throughout the Agency in order to bring in financial control and it is limited, I understand, to three years.

2365 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chairman, just on this point again, is this an individual that previously had been engaged by the Government in the GHA?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, we do not discuss individuals across the floor of the House but the hon. Gentleman has identified who it is and I would rather we did not identify them by name but that is the correct reference.

2370 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am just trying to understand the need on the financial control side because if you look at the Borders and Coastguard Agency budget as a whole, most of it is salaries, which are presumably fairly obvious costs, and the element within which any kind of financial control would be exercised seems to be very, very limited. So there is no revenue or anything like that, so I am not sure we really understand this three-year arrangement.

2375 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, we do not agree. There are issues which we need to deal with in the context of the Borders and Coastguard Agency, issues relating to annual leave, how shift patterns are provided for, etc., etc. All of that has a cost consequence and a serious cost consequence and it needs to be resolved for the purposes of ensuring that the people who work in the Borders and Coastguard Agency have fairness across the board and abuse is stamped out where it is happening in some instances, and other aspects of financial control in the Agency and the workings of the Agency which this individual will assist with. That is why we believe it makes sense to do it and that is why we have done it, Madam Speaker.

2385 **Madam Chair:** Anything else on appendix C? There is more or –

Clerk: Appendix D, Gibraltar Health Authority.

2390 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, I am at page 201 at the top, Establishment continued, the Admin and Support Grades. We have a GHA junior clerk, of which there are 14 full-time, and that goes up to 39 full-time for 2024-25. But then if we go down that list we have a junior GHA clerk/word processor, of which there were two and now there are none. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps explain the difference between those two roles? Because the initial suggestion is that they may be the same role, but then we have word processor, so perhaps some clarification on that.

2400 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I will allow the Hon. Minister to answer now, but just in terms of form so the hon. Lady is aware, where there is italics that is a disappearing grade. So those grades which you ever see in italics is because they are disappearing.

2405 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there has been a review of the workforce at the GHA and a lot of the GHA junior clerks, for example, were the previously AOs and AAs, which have now been regraded to the GHA. So as part of that overall strategy there have been some posts that will be going and there have been some posts that will now be converted into GHA junior clerks.

2410 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for that answer. I am now at the medical and allied professions and if we go down the list to non-consultant hospital doctor, we have gone down from 16 to 10 full-time in – so 2023-24, 16, and 2024-25, 10. Could the Hon. Minister account for the quite big reduction in those?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, Madam Chair.

2415 If you look at the non-consultant hospital doctors under the heading that the hon. Member has pointed out, it is correct that has gone down, but if you go down to the other side, the Medical and Health Professionals on page 202, you will see that there is now a clinical fellow in medicine and accident and emergency, clinical fellow ortho and trauma, and clinical fellow surgery. These together add up to 10 positions which have been increased, and pursuant to the advice of the clinicians we have amended the posts of non-consultant hospital doctors into these positions.

2420 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** The same question really as to the Resident Medical Officer which goes down from full-time six and then we see at 2024 it has gone to two, so if the Hon. Minister could perhaps shed some light on that?

2425 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, it is all part of the same move, so if you look there is a total of 10 that have been changed, or the nomenclature has been changed, and that is part of that process.

2430 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** Now I am moving further down that list on page 201, Approved Mental Health Practitioner, we had four full-time and we will now have three full-time. Can the Hon. Minister shed some light as to whether that is because somebody may have left and are we going to recruit a further practitioner in that area?

2435 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, that is because somebody had left. However, as the hon. Member is aware, and as I confirmed in my speech, we are starting now in September a course where there will be 15 this year and there will be a total of 30 approved mental health practitioners trained. We are in the meantime also recruiting for those positions.

2440 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** On page 202, I note at the at the very bottom of the Medical and Allied Professions list, Dental Nurse. We had six in 2023-24 but it is now showing as zero in 2024-25. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps explain the reasoning for that.

2445 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member goes to the Establishment on page 203, you will see that the complement of dental nurses has now increased to 8.5. It is just that we have changed the position of those dental nurses to include it under the nursing complement rather than under the medical and allied professionals. So the complement has actually increased by 2.5 to 8.5 dental nurses.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, if the hon. Lady needs to look at this, there is a footnote referred to which explains that also.

2450 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** Just one further question. I noticed that Registered Nurse - Chemotherapy are three. We had three in 2023-24, and we are going down to two in 2024-25. Perhaps I am mistaken here, and it has been subsumed elsewhere, but given that we now have obviously the opening of the new suite, etc., surely this should be either kept at the same or increased? Can the hon. Lady explain the reasoning behind the drop in one there?

2455 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am conscious that there is a reason for that. I cannot find it in the Estimates Book but I will ask and get back to the hon. Member on that.

Madam Chair: Anything else on Appendix D?

2460 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** In terms of the 111 Clinical Advisor – I am just looking at page 204. The 111 Clinical Advisors were at zero in 2023-24 but my understanding is that the service was obviously functioning at that point. Why are they now reflected as 10 in 2024-25? Is it due to the change?

2465 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as a press release that came out in April confirms – I am not quite sure of the date – the 111 service has now passed to the Gibraltar Health Authority and there is now a specific service where patients can call the 111 service. That is the increase from zero to 10.

2470 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** Supernumerary Posts. Registered nurses, we had zero in 2023-24, and there are now 25 full-time, 2024-25. Could the hon. Lady explain the reasoning for that?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Yes, Madam Chair. These are the nurses that have been trained here and those nurses will be filling in the vacancies as and when they arise.

2475 **Hon. J. Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, I am now at page 205 of appendix D. I am at Manning Level Maintenance. The estimate for 2023-24 was down as 1,000. I can understand that it is demand-led. But the forecast outturn was 1,050,000 for this year. Why, then, has it gone down, as an estimate, for 2024-25 as £500,000?

2480 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we have been filling in the posts so that we are better manned. We are really controlling the budget in these areas. This was, indeed, based on vacancies which are now filled. Additionally, there is a recovery plan in place to ensure that it does not go to £1 million again this year.

2485 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, given that we are about to get into the recurrent payments in respect of the Gibraltar Health Authority, can I invite the House to recess now until 3 p.m. this afternoon where we can continue with this Committee Stage?

Madam Chair: All right, we will recess until 3 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed at 1.25 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3 p.m.

2490



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 3.40 p.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 9th July 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

[MADAM SPEAKER: Hon. Judge K Ramage GMH *in the Chair*]

[CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: J B Reyes Esq *in attendance*]

Appropriation Bill 2024 – Clauses considered and approved – Concluded

Madam Chair: All right. We left it at appendix D before the break. Does any hon. Member wish to say any last comments on appendix D? Yes, the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

5 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** At the bottom of page 205, I am at line 19, the Telephone Service. One can see that the estimate 2023-24 is £300,000 but the forecast outturn was £530,000. It is £230,000 over for a telephone bill. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify the reason for such an increase?

10 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the GHA has cut their estimate in this respect. This relates to the service that they have resending out text messages, etc., so the expenses there are now settled.

15 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Now moving to head 20 on Printing and Stationery, it is much the same so the estimate was £85,000 and we see that the actual forecast outturn was £280,000. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps explain the reason for that?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Sorry Madam Chair, the reason why it is down to 250?

20 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** The reason why the – so the estimate for 2023-24 was £85,000 but the actual forecast outturn is £280,000 which seems like quite a steep leap upwards. Could the Hon. Minister explain the reason for that?

25 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, costs have been incurred in this area for the printing of information booklets for patients.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Could the Hon. Minister perhaps elaborate on which such booklets have been printed?

30 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, there are numerous printing services that have been incurred, in particular in relation to the Ambulance Service and Public Health, and Pathology has also incurred printing and stationery costs. The costs also incurred in relation to the rental of photocopiers. That is £152,617 is the estimate, based on the forecast outturn for last year. So there are numerous things included in that Head.

35 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am now at line 23 on the next page, GPMS Prescriptions, and there is a line beneath it, Drugs and Pharmaceuticals. Could the Hon. Minister just confirm whether I am right

in saying that GPMS prescriptions is prescriptions that you would get if you went to the PCC, whereas drugs and pharmaceuticals is everything else? Am I correct in my understanding?

40 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, that is correct. GPMS prescriptions relates to what we would narrowly understand by prescriptions. So when you go to see your GP, the blue form, the blue slip that you are in effect given at that point. Whereas drugs and pharmaceuticals relates to everything else that is provided in the hospital.

45 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Chair, the estimate for 2023-24 for GPMS prescriptions, we can see at £9 million and the forecast outturn 2023-24 is £12 million. So there is a £3 million overspend on the estimates. My understanding is that there have actually been cuts as to the amount of drugs that are prescribed now, so that some drugs have to be bought across the counter by individuals. For example, some antihistamines must be bought by the person over the counter because the GHA no longer prescribes. Can the Hon. Minister therefore account for the fact that
50 there is a £3 million difference between that estimate and the forecast outturn?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, what has actually been happening in relation to this is that some generics have been prescribed. So whereas some things are no longer prescribed by
55 the GHA, and there has also been a change in terms of the type of medicines that are prescribed, but that forecast outturn is completely demand-led. So it is what has been required by patients in Gibraltar. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there has been a steep increase in the price of pharmaceuticals worldwide and that is reflected in that forecast outturn.

60 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Line 35, Compensation and Legal Costs, so I can understand why there was an estimate of £1,000 because obviously we do not know how that is going to pan out but £2.495 million for compensation and legal costs seems somewhat steep. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether that is in respect of perhaps one or two bigger cases or a number of cases going across?
65

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, that is in relation to the number of cases that have been either settled or have been taken to court by claimants. That is again entirely demand driven and it is responding to what happens in that in any given year.

70 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, we are now at line 39, which is Sponsored Patients. So the estimate for 2023-24 at £10 million and the forecast outturn for 2023-2024 at over £16 million. We can see that there is overspending, shall we call it, of over £6 million. Can the Hon. Minister perhaps shed some light as to the reason for such a high increase in what was estimated?

75 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, again, sponsored patients is something that is entirely demand led. If any Gibraltar resident requires being sent to a tertiary institution, sponsored patients will look to send to that tertiary institution. The reason that the budget has gone down to £11 million this year, as I explained in my Budget speech, is because we are now repatriating quite a few of those services to Gibraltar. So we expect a significant decrease in the amount of
80 sponsored patients that require to be sent to tertiary institutions in the UK and/or Spain.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Chair, I am now at line 55, the Hospital Rental, we can see that the estimate was £5.080 million but it has coming at a forecast outturn of £5.2 million and moving forward that is the estimate again. So there is a £120,000 increase in rental for the hospital premises. Could the Hon. Minister confirm, is that due to the usual increase in rent and rates that
85 we would see? Or is there another explanation for that?

90 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am informed by the team, by the Financial Secretary's team behind me, that the change year-on-year is because we refinance and we change banks. I am informed that was stated in the Chief Minister's Budget speech last year.

95 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Now, at line 59 of the same page, Maintenance of Ambulance Fleet. We can see nought in the actual estimate and forecast outturn columns until we reach the estimate for 2024-25, where there is an £107,000 estimate. Could the Hon. Minister perhaps elaborate as to the reason for that, why it is not until we reach this year?

100 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in the same way as the bus fleet has a programme for maintenance, we are looking to enter into a structured programme for maintenance for the ambulance fleet. That is currently out for tender or we are looking to put that out for tender in the next few weeks. But the reason for that is that we want to have a structured programme where we know the costs of the maintenance of the ambulance fleet.

Madam Chair: We move on to appendix E, please.

105 **Clerk:** Appendix E, Gibraltar Health Authority, Elderly Residential Services Section.

Madam Chair: Anything on appendix E?

110 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, moving to line 32, Insurance Expenses. Can the Hon. Minister clarify why the forecast outturn for insurance increased so much in 2023-24 and then has gone back down for the next year? Is there a specific reason for this?

115 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am informed that the premium went up last year because it was entered into quite late on. We have tried to secure that premium quite early on this year and ensure that the price of that has gone down significantly. Therefore the price for that has reduced in this financial year.

120 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, moving to line 44, Other Facilities. Can the Hon. Minister clarify what other facilities are referred to in this line.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this is in reference to the Jewish home.

125 **Madam Chair:** I will remind both hon. Ladies that we are in Committee, so we are Chair not Speaker.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Apologies.

Clerk: Appendix F, Care Agency.

130 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Chair, given that – sorry, moving on to line 2, Manning Level Maintenance. Given that this is the most significant figure in the overtime figures for the Care Agency and given the actual figure for 2022-23 and the forecast outturn for 2023-24, does the Hon. Minister believe that the estimate for 2024-25 is a realistic one?

135 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, again, this is a result of changes in the complement. So if we look at the figures of the complement, a lot of the part-time positions have now been changed to full-time vacancies. As a result of change in the complement, so the part-time vacancies are now full-time time vacancies, we do believe that we can bring under control the

140 manning level maintenance. That is a reason for quantifying that reduction in the manning level
141 maintenance in the figures.

Hon. A Sanchez: Moving on to line 12, Relief Cover. The total estimate for the Care Agency
142 budget in 2023-24 was almost £20 million and the forecast outturn for 2023-24 for relief cover
143 alone was almost £14 million. Could the Hon. Minister clarify what relief cover constitutes in detail
144 so we can have a clearer idea of where this overspend went to?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Of course, Madam Speaker. Relief cover relates to the services provided
145 by care workers in relation to services relating to children in care, etc. So this is a main area where
146 we are looking to make the most efficiencies and we have actually got a recovery plan in place to
147 try and bring this figure to the budgeted £11 million.

148 There are numerous factors which are now being looked into by the Care Agency in order to
149 reduce this figure and bring it under control. For example, we are looking to increase care leaders
150 and factor in different ways of giving the same level of service. So the reduction that the hon. Lady
151 is referring to here, Madam Chair, is purely driven by efficiencies which we are asking the Care
152 Agency to make in the service without affecting the level of care.
153

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just understand that? Because if the estimate for last year was
154 £4 million and they spent £13.8 million on relief cover, it is a very significant sum. So this sum goes
155 to a churn created by a need, for example, to have more carers on call, if there are people that
156 require carers. It must be a very significant number of carers and need, because, I mean, obviously,
157 the year before they spent £10.3 million.

158 This year, you are forecasting for next year spending £11 million, so it is suggestive of quite a
159 significant number of carers that are required almost on a daily basis. Is that right? If so, what
160 exactly in the discussions with the contracted entities can be done? Is it a question of expanding
161 those contracts? Is it a question of achieving efficiencies, to use the word of the Minister, by
162 focusing on what?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, the best way to explain this is by giving concrete
163 examples. So, for example, this is driven by the number of children in care and unfortunately the
164 number of children in care has increased year-on-year. So to give you a concrete example, which
165 I think answers the Leader of the Opposition's point entirely, is in order to cover for eight children
166 in care, we need 58 carers. So the more we reduce the number of children in care in ways which
167 are most appropriate for those children, the more we reduce the number of carers.

168 So we have numerous children in care at the moment, Madam Chair, which are 18-year-olds.
169 So we are looking to reallocate those houses. I am working with the Hon. Minister for Housing in
170 order to reallocate those children from care into their own flats in order to reduce the number of
171 carers that we need. There are other examples. For example, there have been very successful
172 opportunities that we have had in foster care where children that have been in care have actually
173 been fostered. So the number of children in care is being reduced in ways which is actually
174 beneficial to those children and thereby reducing the need for carers. But the need for relief cover
175 is driven almost entirely by numbers, such as the number of children in care.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That is helpful to understand it. So just for confirmation, this entire figure
176 is going towards care of children, there is no relief cover for adults?

177
Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, that was an example of the type of circumstances which
178 give rise to relief cover. The relief cover goes to children and adults, but it is an example of the
179 type of efficiency that we are asking the Care Agency to make. We are looking to ask the Care
180 Agency to look into each and every case to see how we can better the circumstances of each and
181 every individual, and at the same time make efficiencies and save money.
182

Madam Chair: Anything else on appendix F?

195 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Yes, Madam Chair. On line 35, Day Centre, estimated £80,000 for 2023-24, coming in at £140,000, estimated next year £70,000 but the outturn for 2022-23 was in fact £134,000. So we are projected next year to see half of what we spent this year. Can the Minister explain?

200 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, once again, we have asked the Care Agency to make efficiencies and they have produced a detailed plan on savings they can make in terms of the Day Centre. The detailed plan comes to £70,000. This is driven by efficiencies, Madam Chair, that the Care Agency itself has thought they can make in the Day Centre.

205 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, would she have an example of the sorts of efficiencies she is talking about for a day centre? I would have thought there would not be much scope or flexibility in the running of a day centre. I would be interested in any examples the Minister might have.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Unfortunately, Madam Chair, I do not have specific examples in terms of the Day Centre, but I can make sure that those come to the hon. Member.

210 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Chair, we will move on to line 30, Home Support Disability Review. Can the Hon. Minister clarify what the Home Support Disability Review consists of and perhaps she can clarify who is conducting the review and how these costs are being incurred?

215 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, this line relates to the Community Learning and the Disabilities Team, so its costs derived entirely from this service.

Hon. A Sanchez: The Disability Learning Team is conducting the review themselves?

220 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** These are costs incurred by the team, yes.

Hon. A Sanchez: But can the Hon. Minister clarify who is conducting the review? It says it is a Home Disability Review. Someone must be conducting the review. Can she clarify who is conducting the review?

225 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, whilst the heading can be somewhat misleading, this is a cost of the services such as Boathouse. So the Community Learning Disabilities Team, it is the cost of the entirety of that service provision.

230 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Chair, in 44, Security Services is an estimated provision for only half as much as that forecast outturn for 2023-24 or even the actual out turn for 2022-23. Does that mean there has been a reduction in the services required?

235 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, yes. It is deemed that some of the security services provided are not required and therefore there has been a reduction in security services provided.

Hon. E J Reyes: We see that there is a focus outturn of an *ex-gratia* payment made which even surpasses the estimate for the total security services expected for this year. What was that *ex-gratia* payment made?

240 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, these were claims awarded by the tribunal.

Madam Chair: Anything else on appendix F? Move on.

Clerk: Appendix G, Gibraltar Electricity Authority.

245 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask on Item 24, which is the Contribution to ES Ltd? I note that it went up between 2022-23 and 2023-24 by £1 million, and projecting to go up by £1 million again. Can we have confirmation of why that is the case?

250 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, the contribution to ES Ltd includes the financing of the North Mole Power Station. The increase by £1 million includes the financing of the North Mole Power Station, the long-term service agreements with MAN, and the emissions monitoring contract.

255 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Chair, on line 21, Contribution to Zero Carbon Footprint Ltd, which is a new line item for 2024-25, £1.5 million. Can the Minister explain what this is for and if she has any information on the company, where it is incorporated and who owns it?

260 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, the company is a 100% Government-owned company and that is entering into all the contracts for the BESS. So the £1.5 million relates to the financing of the BESS.

265 **Hon. R M Clinton:** This is a recurrent expenditure, not capital expenditure? When you say 'owned by the Government' is this directly owned by the Government of Gibraltar or through some other entity?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, all financing costs are recurring costs, that is why they are always booked as recurring costs.

270 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, so this is financing costs, how much is being borrowed then to purchase these batteries? I am not sure that information is in the public domain.

275 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Chair, let me make that clearer. Those are the contract costs with SCA, which is the company the Government is entering into its agreement with for the provision of the BESS. The £1.5 million includes the costs of the ongoing arrangements with SCA. It is in the press release relating to the BESS project.

280 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Just finally, Madam Speaker, the ownership of the company, which is owned by the Government, is this directly by the Government or intermediary company or Gibraltar Development Corporation? I would be very grateful if she could assist.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, we believe it is a GDC-owned company.

Clerk: Appendix H, Gibraltar Port Authority.

285 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am going to take the Minister to 12, which is the Maintenance of Port Installations. Can she explain why there was an increase from one year to the next of £205,000? I think the ambition, at least at this stage, is to bring the figure back to what it was previously but there seems to be a blip between those two years. Well, the same year, but the estimated amounts does not reflect the forecast outturn.

290 **Hon. G. Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, this relates to a rental agreement that the Port entered into for the rental of – sorry, Madam Chair, this relates to a rental agreement that the Port entered into for the rental of fenders at the port.

295 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Sorry, and the rental agreement resulted in this increase and now it is going
back down? I do not understand why there is that sudden spike in the figures. You would have
thought that if there is a rental agreement that would be stable.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, it was a temporary rental agreement that was entered
300 into for the rental of fenders at the port.

Hon. D J Bossino: In relation to the 20, which is the Vessel Tracking System, she answered
under the pink pages, a capital expenditure that was going to be incurred, I think she said, in
relation to that. So can she explain why there has been an expected increase in the figures there?
305

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Chair, similar to the answer given previously in relation to one
of the other portfolios, there is a difference between the capital expenditure, which is covered in
the pink pages, and the maintenance expenditures, which is covered in these pages. So line 20 in
the GPA's portfolio relates to the maintenance of the VTS system.
310

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, I appreciate that but my question was why the increase?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the increase is due to various annual increases. It is
an SLA agreement, the VTS system maintenance which is increased. This includes the VMS
315 maintenance and modifications, radar replacements and maintenance and the spare parts. Also
there is a mandatory virtual server licence renewal fee.

Madam Chair: Anything else on appendix H? Next.

320 **Clerk:** Appendix I, Housing Works Agency.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, if I can take the Minister to 4, which is Bonus Payments. Can she explain
what that relates to?

325 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, those are the bonus payments under the agreement
that we inherited from them when we were elected.

Madam Chair: Anything else on Appendix I. All right, move on.

330 **Clerk:** Appendix J, Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Chair, on 26, below the Cleaning Services, again, there is *ex-gratia*
payments estimated outturn £55,000. But the year before, it was close to that. It was £49,770. So
it seems to be something that is recurring. What was it exactly? Was it another court judgment?
335 What caused us to pay the *ex-gratia*?

Minister for Industrial Relations, Civil Contingencies and Sport (Hon. L M Bruzon): Madam
Chair, that refers to a member of staff who was supernumerary and left. That was the payment.

340 **Hon. E J Reyes:** So if it has happened on two consecutive years it must be more than one
member of staff and why does someone who was supernumerary suddenly receive an *ex-gratia*
payment? Surely they either were employees. At the Sports and Leisure Authority there is a
contributory and well-established pension scheme there so it does not quite justify that expense.

345 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, there are two individuals, one one year and the other the
other year and that was what they were owed as part of their retirement.

350 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Sorry, I am not sure if we caught on this side, the Minister is saying that these are early retirement payments to individuals who work for the GSLA on a supernumerary basis, they are not *ex-gratia* payments like the other item in the other appendix which were as a result of a court judgment? These are agreed payments by way of early retirement. Is that what the Minister is saying?

355 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Chairman, these are not in the nature of the *ex-gratia* payments that you saw on the other schedule, those related to civil servants in particular and other individuals. These are severance payments in effect, they are not early retirements, they are severance payments in effect and that is why they are booked here.

360 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Severance payments of civil servants working under the GSLA, on what basis, I am not sure?

Hon. Chief Minister: Direct employees of the GSLA, Madam Chair.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Direct employees of the GSLA so not Crown employees?

365 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, whether or not they are Crown employees is another argument because there is an argument anybody who receives emolument from the Crown is somehow a Crown servant, but these would be paid by the GSLA and they are direct employees of the GSLA, not civil servants, not GDC employees.

370 **Madam Chair:** Anything else on appendix J? Yes.

Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Chair.

375 On line 21, Bathing Pavilion Expenses, estimate £90,000, outturn for 2023-24 £160,000 and then reducing to £90,000 again in 2024-25. There is £70,000 difference either way. I would be grateful for some explanation from the Minister.

Hon. L M Bruzon: Yes, Madam Chair, they just refer to increases in that particular year to the maintenance and upkeep of the facilities.

380 **Hon. R M Clinton:** But I imagine there is a set maintenance contract or are these items under the contract which are outside the normal scope of work?

385 **Hon. L M Bruzon:** Madam Chair, there are no maintenance contracts. Repairs are undertaken as and when required.

Madam Chair: Anything else on appendix J. Sorry, was there something else? No. Appendices B to J stand part of the Bill. Clauses 7 and 8 stand part of the Bill.

390 **Clerk:** The Schedule.

Madam Chair: The Schedule stands part of the Bill.

Clerk: The long title.

395 **Madam Chair:** The long title stands part of the Bill.

**Appropriation Bill;
Limitation Periods (Amendment) Bill 2023;
Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Bill 2023 –
Third Reading approved: Bills passed**

Clerk: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I have the honour to report that the Appropriation Bill
400 2024, the Limitation Periods (Amendment) Bill 2023 and the Mutual Legal Assistance
(International) (Amendment) Bill 2023 has been considered in Committee and agreed to with no
amendments, and I now move that they be read a third time and passed.

Madam Speaker: I now put the question which is that the Appropriation Bill 2024, the
405 Limitation Periods (Amendment) Bill 2023, the Mutual Legal Assistance (International)
(Amendment) Bill 2023 be read a third time and passed. Those in favour of the Appropriation Bill
2024? (**Members:** Aye) Those against? (**Opposition Members:** No). Carried.

Those in favour of the Limitation Periods (Amendment) Bill 2023? (**Members:** Aye) Those
against? Carried.

410 Those in favour of the Mutual Legal Assistance (International) (Amendment) Bill 2023?
(**Members:** Aye) Those against? Carried.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, in those circumstances, and given that there is nothing
else in the Order of the Day, I would now move that the House should now adjourn *sine die*.

415 Madam Speaker, to assist all hon. Members, I should indicate that it is not the Government's
intention to call another meeting of the House for this month, given commitments that the Deputy
Chief Minister and I expect to have in the context of continued international obligations. So I move
that the House should now adjourn *sine die*.

420 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine*
die. I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour?
(**Members:** Aye) Those against? Passed This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 3.40 p.m.