



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.02 p.m. – 6.05 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 14th March 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.02 p.m.

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

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

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q359/2024

**Employees on sick leave –
Broken down by month**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament Thursday, 14th March 2024. Chief Minister's Questions.
5 Question 359/2024. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide statistics as to the number of
employees on sick leave from 2019 to date, broken down by month within the following services:
10 Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service; Royal Gibraltar Police; HM Customs Gibraltar; Gibraltar Borders
and Coast Guard Agency; Ambulance Service; and HM Prison Service?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, we can, but before I do can I just comment
15 that – and I am sure the whole House will want to join me – in wishing all the very best to the
Gibraltar GFA team playing right now against Iceland in the under-16 Development Tournament,
and for all of the rest of the games that they have over this weekend.

In answer to the question, Madam Speaker, I pass the hon. Lady a schedule with the
20 information requested.

25

30

ANSWER TO QUESTION 359

Gibraltar Fire & Rescue Service		Royal Gibraltar Police		HM Customs		HM Prison		Borders & Coastguard Agency		Ambulance Service	
Month / Year	Total Number of Employees	Month / Year	Total Number of Employees	Month / Year	Total Number of Employees	Month / Year	Total Number of Employees	Month / Year	Total Number of Employees	Month / Year	Total Number of Employees
Jan-19	25	Jan-19	39	Jan-19	41	Jan-19	16	Jan-19	52	Jan-19	8
Feb-19	23	Feb-19	36	Feb-19	36	Feb-19	10	Feb-19	44	Feb-19	11
Mar-19	22	Mar-19	38	Mar-19	42	Mar-19	13	Mar-19	44	Mar-19	7
Apr-19	18	Apr-19	31	Apr-19	29	Apr-19	12	Apr-19	38	Apr-19	6
May-19	25	May-19	34	May-19	35	May-19	11	May-19	31	May-19	5
Jun-19	27	Jun-19	27	Jun-19	29	Jun-19	12	Jun-19	44	Jun-19	5
Jul-19	29	Jul-19	33	Jul-19	38	Jul-19	15	Jul-19	50	Jul-19	7
Aug-19	30	Aug-19	29	Aug-19	38	Aug-19	18	Aug-19	41	Aug-19	4
Sep-19	23	Sep-19	32	Sep-19	27	Sep-19	21	Sep-19	38	Sep-19	10
Oct-19	27	Oct-19	40	Oct-19	34	Oct-19	15	Oct-19	43	Oct-19	8
Nov-19	27	Nov-19	48	Nov-19	41	Nov-19	18	Nov-19	47	Nov-19	5
Dec-19	34	Dec-19	51	Dec-19	46	Dec-19	11	Dec-19	44	Dec-19	7
Jan-20	28	Jan-20	43	Jan-20	53	Jan-20	11	Jan-20	50	Jan-20	10
Feb-20	34	Feb-20	44	Feb-20	40	Feb-20	17	Feb-20	49	Feb-20	6
Mar-20	11	Mar-20	45	Mar-20	21	Mar-20	14	Mar-20	30	Mar-20	6
Apr-20	8	Apr-20	32	Apr-20	13	Apr-20	9	Apr-20	15	Apr-20	4
May-20	11	May-20	26	May-20	4	May-20	2	May-20	18	May-20	2
Jun-20	20	Jun-20	27	Jun-20	9	Jun-20	10	Jun-20	18	Jun-20	5
Jul-20	31	Jul-20	29	Jul-20	30	Jul-20	13	Jul-20	26	Jul-20	12
Aug-20	27	Aug-20	41	Aug-20	36	Aug-20	10	Aug-20	34	Aug-20	6
Sep-20	17	Sep-20	35	Sep-20	28	Sep-20	16	Sep-20	32	Sep-20	8
Oct-20	25	Oct-20	47	Oct-20	30	Oct-20	15	Oct-20	33	Oct-20	6
Nov-20	27	Nov-20	55	Nov-20	24	Nov-20	15	Nov-20	33	Nov-20	1
Dec-20	10	Dec-20	47	Dec-20	15	Dec-20	15	Dec-20	30	Dec-20	2
Jan-21	10	Jan-21	92	Jan-21	8	Jan-21	7	Jan-21	15	Jan-21	3
Feb-21	15	Feb-21	46	Feb-21	11	Feb-21	14	Feb-21	15	Feb-21	2
Mar-21	29	Mar-21	53	Mar-21	29	Mar-21	16	Mar-21	35	Mar-21	2
Apr-21	20	Apr-21	32	Apr-21	20	Apr-21	16	Apr-21	21	Apr-21	6
May-21	31	May-21	33	May-21	25	May-21	23	May-21	23	May-21	6
Jun-21	22	Jun-21	57	Jun-21	29	Jun-21	22	Jun-21	37	Jun-21	8
Jul-21	25	Jul-21	40	Jul-21	33	Jul-21	9	Jul-21	41	Jul-21	7
Aug-21	23	Aug-21	41	Aug-21	38	Aug-21	16	Aug-21	37	Aug-21	8
Sep-21	24	Sep-21	58	Sep-21	48	Sep-21	14	Sep-21	38	Sep-21	8
Oct-21	28	Oct-21	56	Oct-21	34	Oct-21	24	Oct-21	42	Oct-21	7
Nov-21	29	Nov-21	79	Nov-21	42	Nov-21	16	Nov-21	37	Nov-21	7
Dec-21	26	Dec-21	70	Dec-21	44	Dec-21	20	Dec-21	34	Dec-21	14
Jan-22	13	Jan-22	82	Jan-22	25	Jan-22	18	Jan-22	33	Jan-22	11
Feb-22	24	Feb-22	67	Feb-22	27	Feb-22	15	Feb-22	26	Feb-22	16
Mar-22	31	Mar-22	91	Mar-22	32	Mar-22	26	Mar-22	39	Mar-22	15
Apr-22	21	Apr-22	94	Apr-22	8	Apr-22	21	Apr-22	35	Apr-22	6
May-22	26	May-22	59	May-22	44	May-22	18	May-22	37	May-22	11
Jun-22	30	Jun-22	65	Jun-22	34	Jun-22	17	Jun-22	33	Jun-22	11
Jul-22	27	Jul-22	62	Jul-22	39	Jul-22	17	Jul-22	37	Jul-22	14
Aug-22	29	Aug-22	64	Aug-22	41	Aug-22	21	Aug-22	40	Aug-22	8
Sep-22	25	Sep-22	47	Sep-22	28	Sep-22	20	Sep-22	33	Sep-22	6
Oct-22	32	Oct-22	66	Oct-22	49	Oct-22	17	Oct-22	49	Oct-22	7
Nov-22	35	Nov-22	88	Nov-22	48	Nov-22	17	Nov-22	31	Nov-22	8
Dec-22	35	Dec-22	69	Dec-22	49	Dec-22	10	Dec-22	44	Dec-22	11
Jan-23	29	Jan-23	69	Jan-23	41	Jan-23	18	Jan-23	29	Jan-23	8
Feb-23	19	Feb-23	68	Feb-23	35	Feb-23	15	Feb-23	43	Feb-23	7
Mar-23	22	Mar-23	80	Mar-23	56	Mar-23	23	Mar-23	37	Mar-23	8
Apr-23	28	Apr-23	67	Apr-23	37	Apr-23	15	Apr-23	31	Apr-23	4
May-23	29	May-23	82	May-23	39	May-23	19	May-23	32	May-23	9
Jun-23	32	Jun-23	56	Jun-23	40	Jun-23	15	Jun-23	34	Jun-23	11
Jul-23	32	Jul-23	64	Jul-23	38	Jul-23	15	Jul-23	34	Jul-23	10
Aug-23	32	Aug-23	76	Aug-23	31	Aug-23	16	Aug-23	47	Aug-23	11
Sep-23	32	Sep-23	73	Sep-23	36	Sep-23	16	Sep-23	41	Sep-23	6
Oct-23	35	Oct-23	76	Oct-23	43	Oct-23	23	Oct-23	47	Oct-23	11
Nov-23	36	Nov-23	94	Nov-23	36	Nov-23	23	Nov-23	36	Nov-23	10
Dec-23	37	Dec-23	89	Dec-23	32	Dec-23	18	Dec-23	46	Dec-23	15
Jan-24	33	Jan-24	89	Jan-24	37	Jan-24	17	Jan-24	40	Jan-24	11
Feb-24	17	Feb-24	60	Feb-24	36	Feb-24	18	Feb-24	35	Feb-24	4

35 **Madam Speaker:** All right, let's move on to the next question and I will allow the hon. Member some time to consider that then we will come back for Supplementaries.

Q360/2024
Import Duty –
Collected February 2024

40 **Clerk:** Question 360/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amount of Import Duty collected for the month of February 2024?

45 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, the Import Duty collected for February 2024 is £10,843,925.59.

50 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q361/2024
Total loan facility availability –
Gibraltar Football Association/Stadium Development Limited –
Advancement of monies

Clerk: Question 361/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Madam Speaker: Is there a next question?

55 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Sorry, Madam Speaker, I had not heard it.
Can the Government advise how much is the total loan facility it has made available to the Gibraltar Football Association and/or Stadium Development Limited and from where are the monies advanced?

60 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, further to the answer to Question 221/2024, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar has to date made available £565,449.81 to Stadium Development Limited in respect of management services and design for the new stadium.

65 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I do not think I have heard the second part of my question as to where were the monies advanced from. Is it, for example, the Improvement Development fund or Government company, or the GDC?

70 **Hon. Chief Minister:** I said Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. So a Government General Account, I assume, Madam Speaker. I am told that it is an advance account opened on behalf of Stadium Development Limited. *(Interjection)*

Hon. R M Clinton: I am sorry, one last question, Madam Speaker.
75 In terms of the number of £560,000-odd that he mentioned, is that the current outstanding or is that the amount of loan facility, that I was specifically looking for? Is there a facility, for example, of £1 million of which £565,000 has been drawn down on?

80 **Hon. Chief Minister:** It is the current amount outstanding, Madam Speaker, there is not a limit that has been set. We have agreed to a system with the amounts that they need during the course of the development period. That is to say, the plans, the architect's fees, etc.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q362-63/2024
Government Agency offices list –
Moving to privately owned accommodation

85 **Clerk:** Question 362/2024. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide a list of the current Government/Government agency offices, which the Government is planning to move to privately owned accommodation.

90 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with 363.

95 **Clerk:** Question 363/2024. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide a list of Government office premises which are currently vacant.

100 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to my answers to Questions 83 and 242/2024. The Government has a manifesto commitment to provide a good working environment for its employees and in light of this the Government will make an announcement about its planned relocations in due course.

105 Madam Speaker, the only Government office premises currently vacant is 16 Governor's Parade.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementary? Next question.

Q364-65/2024
Chief Secretary's written protocol –
Opposition's access to head Civil Servants in advance of General Election

110 **Clerk:** Question 364/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I take the opportunity to adopt also the remarks of the Hon. the Chief Minister in relation to the well wishes of this House, to the GFA under-16 players playing right now.

115 Will the Government agree to ask the Chief Secretary to devise a written protocol that would ensure that the Opposition have access to heads of Civil Service Departments within a defined period, well in advance of the next General Election and within the calendar year within which the next General Election is due?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

120 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 365.

Clerk: Question 365/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

125 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Will the Government agree to ask the Chief Secretary to ensure there is a written protocol in place for the next General Election that would allow all candidates access to Government or agency authority premises under controlled conditions during the 30-day campaign period?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

130 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the policy of the GSLP Liberal Government, since we were elected in 2011, has been to allow the Opposition to engage with senior civil servants in what is commonly referred to as 'access talks', where an administration approaches the end of a parliamentary term or General Election is imminent.

135 This was set out in the 2011 New Dawn GSLP Liberal General Election manifesto. Thereafter, Madam Speaker, a press release was issued to this effect on 23rd September 2015, it was press release 647/2015. This was also directly communicated to the Opposition at the time and to the then Leader of the Opposition ahead of the 2015 General Election by letter of the Chief Secretary dated 23rd September 2015.

140 It was an offer that was not taken up which made sense, Madam Speaker, given that they had refused *my* request in 2011 for such access talks. I understand the same was true in 2019 and 2023. Indeed, this policy position of the GSLP Liberal Government was recently specifically referred to in a letter from the then Acting Chief Secretary to the Hon. Mr Sacarello of 25th October 2023.

145 Incidentally, I would add that when I requested such access talks in 2011, Madam Speaker, from the party of Members opposite, I was specifically refused. I am, therefore, surprised they have changed their position, but I welcome the GSD's U-turn or *volte face* on this issue.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I am not going to enter into a discussion with the hon. Member on the issue of U-turns, because there are plenty of U-turns which are ostensibly being made by Members on that side of the House. I gather from his answer that he has stated what their policy is but what I specifically asked him is whether there will be a written protocol.

Now, he has directed me to a press release and a letter. I am not sure that any of those actually answer the point of there being a written protocol, which I have asked for.

155 So I repeat the question: in light of the fact that, what is underlying the question is that we both agree, it appears, that it is important for there to be a policy on access talks for the future and in my question a policy which also is condensed into a written protocol. Does he agree that there should be discussions on a written protocol if one does not exist already?

160 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not know what it is that the hon. Gentleman thinks we are doing which is a U-turn in any way. I am not surprised, however, that he makes that reference without particularising it, as is ever the case with him. He makes generalisations, which he does not descend to particularising, but so be it. The question is not about U-turns, it is about access talks.

165 It is not, Madam Speaker, that we both now agree, it is that they now agree with us, which I am very pleased to see. Therein lies the *volte face* or the U-turn, at least at a party level. Madam Speaker, a written protocol in respect of these matters is not, in my view, something that he and I need to engage in. It is a matter for the Chief Secretary; and as I understand it, the Chief

170 Secretary already deals with these matters in communication with senior heads of Department and sets out how these things would be done should the offer ever have been taken up.

But unfortunately, as Members opposite did not take up the offer, which was entirely in keeping with their approach at the time that they were in Government that these things should not happen, it is for that reason that, I believe, there has not been any need to set anything out in writing.

175

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I cannot speak for 2015, although I am being told that that may not be strictly the case in relation to that year. Certainly from my perspective going forward, without having a history lesson as to what did or did not happen in relation to previous elections, I think we are both saying that it is good for there to be a principle of access talks; and if the hon. Member is saying that the reason that there has not been a written protocol is because it is not being taken up, I am not going to enter into whether that is or is not accurate, if that is his belief is he content that I should write to the Chief Secretary to engage in such discussions, aiming at clearly demarcating the procedure going forward?

180

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, let me start at the beginning of that.

185

He says that he is not certain that what I have said about 2015 is actually what happened. I have a copy of the press release from the Government issued on 23rd September 2015 and it reads as follows:

The Chief Minister, the Hon Fabian Picardo QC –

– as I was at the time –

... MP, has asked the Chief Secretary, Mr Ernest Gomez, to contact the Leader of the Opposition, Daniel Feetham in order to facilitate contact with senior civil servants in the run up to the General Election. Such contact is permitted by convention in the United Kingdom in the months before a General Election is due. The GSD denied Mr Picardo such contact when the GSLP / Liberals were in Opposition. Mr Picardo then committed himself to allow such contact if he became Chief Minister and is now acting on that commitment. The Chief Minister said: 'I have changed many things about the way the Government deals with the Opposition. This is just one of them. I have also ensured that Opposition Members of Parliament have been invited to Government functions, something the GSD had in many instances stopped doing. Another thing I do is invite the Leader of the Opposition to the events of Gibraltar day in London. So now I am going further in establishing better democratic rules for the functioning of party politics in Gibraltar by allowing the operation of this convention based on the UK Westminster model. This means that communication by the Opposition with senior civil servants on their proposed policies can now happen, as set out in our manifesto.'

190

And, Madam Speaker, on the same day, 23rd September 2015, this letter issued from the Chief Secretary to the then Leader of the Opposition, Daniel Feetham:

Dear Daniel,

I write further to the correspondence between the Chief Minister, the Hon. Fabian Picardo QC, MP and my predecessor as Chief Secretary in an acting capacity, Mr Richard Armstrong, in the run up to the last General Election, that is to say, the 2011 General Election.

In that correspondence, the former GSD administration denied Mr Picardo, the then Leader of the Opposition, the opportunity of communicating with senior civil servants in respect of pledges he wished to discuss in the event, which did transpire, that the GSLP Liberals were to form Government.

That is his way of referring to the glorious New Dawn of 9th December 2011.

As Mr Picardo pledged then in Government. He would reverse that decision and allow a future opposition to have access to senior civil servants for the purpose referred to above. In the circumstances, I am inviting you to commence such contact. The contact should be established directly through me or Frank Carreras, the senior administrator. I look forward to hearing from you should you wish to avail yourself of the Chief Minister's offer.

That letter was not replied to.

195 Madam Speaker, this is not a history lesson: this is confirmation that we have implemented the policy that there should be Opposition contact with the Civil Service in the run up to a General Election, if the Opposition so wish. If the Opposition does not wish, they do not need to engage.

Now, what is it that would then happen? Well, it is very simple, Madam Speaker, the Chief Secretary would facilitate those contacts. I do not think, given what I am telling him, that it is up to the Leader of the Opposition to write to the Chief Secretary to establish what the Government's policy already is. It is already the Government's policy that they can have that contact.

200 The mechanism in which that contact will be carried out is in keeping with the UK Convention of how it is carried out. In my view, there is no need for there to be a written protocol to provide for how that contact is to be carried out, because it is very simple: it is carried out with the senior civil servants, it is carried out in private, the information is not shared with Ministers, and Members of the Opposition do not make statements about the things that the Civil Service tell them in the context of those access talks. All of the information is to be available in the event of them winning an election, but they can use it to develop policy in the run up to a General Election. That is the whole purpose.

205 So, Madam Speaker, that is my view, but I do not stand in the way of the Leader of the Opposition writing to whoever he wants. Indeed, it is a matter entirely for him. If he wishes to write to the Chief Secretary, the Chief Secretary will consider how to reply. But I imagine that he will very likely reply on the basis of what I have just set out, because that is what he and I have discussed in the run up to the last General Election; and what I have discussed with other Chief Secretaries in the run up to previous General Elections, when I have had the honour and privilege of being the person calling those General Elections and ensuring that *this* policy, which is a GSLP/Liberal policy implemented from when we won the General Election in 2011, is implemented going forward.

215 It is not a policy of the GSD; it is not a policy being made now because the GSD are proposing it, it is a policy that the GSD were against in Government and the GSLP Liberals have implemented in Government.

220

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Azopardi.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I do have another Supplementary, but I am just going to give way if Madam Speaker is happy for my colleague to my left on a small issue.

225

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, as a Member of the Parliament from 2015 I can actually say I attended such a meeting in the offices of the Financial Secretary. So the offer was taken up.

230 Now, whether there is any documentary evidence or any letters exchanged, I cannot at this stage recall, but I can certainly tell the House that I did attend such a meeting in the offices of the Financial Secretary. I just say that for the information of the House.

Hon. Chief Minister: I am very pleased to hear that, Madam Speaker, because if that is the case, then it is further evidence of the fact that there does not need to be a protocol. Because I was not even told that they had taken it up, which is in keeping with the rule set out in the UK that that exchange is confidential to the then senior civil servants and the Members of the Opposition who take up the offer.

235 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful too for the clarification of the Hon. Mr Clinton; and indeed can I just say as a preface when I said that what the Chief Minister had said was not exactly accurate – because this is what Mr Clinton was whispering to me at the time – I was talking about precisely what my hon. Colleague has clarified.

240 I was not saying that there had not been a press release and I was not saying that there had not been a letter issued by the Chief Secretary, and nor have I suggested – because I know it was

245 there – that it was not in the 2011 manifesto of the Members opposite the so-called what, in his mind only, is the Glorious New Dawn.

Can I just ask, because he talks about these exchanges and he says there is no need for a written protocol: is it the case that the policy extends not just to the so-called access talks, but to the period of the 30-day campaigning period during the election. Does it extend to that? And if not, is it something that the Government is happy to extend this to?

250

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is insufficiently precise when he puts his remarks and that is something which is not at all in keeping with the rigour that we have to have when we address this House.

255 The hon. Gentleman has said in his preamble that it is only, he said, *only* in my mind that 9th December 2011 was a glorious new dawn. Only in my mind. Well, Madam Speaker, I can think of this of one more person who thinks it was a glorious new dawn, let alone all of the others who sit on this side of the House and who have sat on this side of the House since 2011.

260 Our families, our supporters, indeed, the party that I represent is, as I understand it, the party with the largest number of Members in Gibraltar. So, I guarantee the House that it should not be misled by the statement from the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition, which he made vehemently, that I was the only person who thought that 9th December 2011 was a glorious new dawn.

265 Indeed, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has Members sitting in his ranks who emailed me at the time congratulating me on my victory and wishing to work with me thereafter, and *did* work with me thereafter and exchanged many emails with me thereafter as a result of the glorious new dawn of 2011. But be that as it may, Madam Speaker, I said 90 days; 30 is inclusive of 90 so yes, absolutely it would be inclusive of the 30 days of the General Election campaign.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q366/2024

New relationship for Gibraltar – Talks/negotiations with EU

270 **Clerk:** Question 366/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the Chief Minister comment on the state of talks on the negotiations leading to the conclusion of a Treaty for a new relationship for Gibraltar with the EU following the round of talks held in London on 28th and 29th February 2024?

275 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Chief Minister.

280 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, of course, on 27th February together with the Deputy Chief Minister, the Attorney General and the Chief Secretary, I travelled to London to attend meetings which took place in the next day, 28th February. The meetings were internal UK-Gibraltar meetings with senior UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office officials, including the Ambassador and Head of the UK Mission to the European Union, Lindsay Croisdale-Appleby.

285 The purpose of the meeting was, at a high level, to take stock of where we have got to in our negotiations with the European Union, review the progress made in recent rounds of discussions with the EU Commission and identify the issues outstanding. With respect to those outstanding points decisions were jointly made on how to approach these difficult issues and how to do so in a manner which respects the limits of our well-defined and oft-repeated lines on sovereignty, jurisdiction and control.

290 As a result of these meetings negotiating teams now have an agreed strategy set and they have received the political steers required to navigate the continuing negotiations. We now expect a very intense period of discussions with different parties and at all levels, as we attempt to wrap up what is required to be settled.

295 Madam Speaker, for reasons I have already explained I will not be drawn into providing any finer detail on what it is that we discussed with our UK colleagues during these meetings. We are at a stage where to find a compromise on the final issues at stake, which are the most complex issues which separate us from a treaty, negotiators on all sides need the space to persuade themselves to agree solutions. In my judgement, airing any details at this sensitive moment would impede the progress of that process.

300 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, then, the hon. Member knows that we are giving him ample space, although I do ask this question from time to time because I think it is in the public interest to ask the question and for him to comment publicly on these issues.

305 Can I ask him, because we are two weeks away from Easter, are there programmed talks over the next two weeks of a political and/or technical nature? Is there going to be a formal round, a Ministerial round? Is he going to go to talks? Is there something in the diary on these issues?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman knows that I have never complained that he asked this question, I think is absolutely appropriate and I have never suggested that he should not ask the question.

310 Madam Speaker, there are such dates in the diary.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, in relation to, obviously we are going to an intense period, as he says and indeed since I tabled this question we have had the visit of the Minister of State Leo Docherty, and also there was an exchange between Mr Docherty and the Bill Cash interest of the EU Scrutiny Committee; and indeed there were reported remarks by Lord Cameron yesterday reported in the press today in relation to the issue of timescale.

315 And I wanted to ask him about that. I know that his answer previously has been that he does not want to be drawn on a timescale, and indeed Lord Cameron said the same this morning, at least reported in the press this morning.

320 He did make a point, though, which I had not seen expressed in that way before because I had understood that of course there was an eagerness for there to be a conclusion, or at least in terms of setting parameters – if perhaps I take the word ‘eagerness’ out – in terms of timescales that we were looking at the period of Easter or April in the run up to the European elections. But I had understood that were an agreement not possible by then it might be possible then to renew matters after the European elections.

325 But Lord Cameron did introduce an element which I had not seen expressed in that way before, which is where he talked about the fact that after European elections, of course, you have got what they call in German the *Spitzenkandidat*, a change in personnel or indeed in the presidency of the European Commission and that may impact on talks, I assume.

330 So I am asking him: does he have a view in terms of timescale as to the importance of reaching an agreement before the European elections because of that dimension?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, Lord Cameron was not speaking this morning. Indeed, he was not speaking yesterday for it to be reported today. He was speaking on 12th March, which is two days ago. His reference to the *Spitzenkandidat* is about who is the *candidate* to be the President of the European Commission, and the candidate to be the President of the European Commission for the EPP is President von der Leyen, who will repeat as *Spitzenkandidat*.

335 Therefore, Madam Speaker, my view is that we should all wish to do this as soon as possible. We should all wish to ensure that we do not waste a day in the context of the negotiation. But our view is that even after the European election it is possible for us to continue the negotiation.

Of course, there may be a change in the European Commission, *Spitzenkandidat* von der Leyen may not succeed in her bid to continue as European Commission President, or Vice President Šefčovič may not be the Vice President of the European Commission and he has been extraordinarily helpful in the process of this negotiation as an interlocutor at a senior European level.

But he may continue to be the Vice President of the European Commission, and indeed if he does not continue as Vice President of the European Commission, whether or not Miss von der Leyen continues as President, those who take over may be equally helpful and desirous of reaching a positive conclusion to the negotiation between the United Kingdom and the European Union in respect of Gibraltar.

Of course, there will have to be a hiatus in the period when there is not a European Commission and even if both von der Leyen and Šefčovič were to return to their posts, some of those who make up the cabinets may change and the negotiation may, therefore, suffer a further hiatus.

But we would certainly want to continue negotiation were it is not possible to have concluded the negotiation by the time that the European election is held, or indeed by the time that the European Parliament has been dissolved. This is why we will not set a deadline, although there is what the Minister of State, Leo Docherty, I thought very eloquently described in Gibraltar, as a 'moment of political compression'; because one of the entities here, which is the European Union, is going into its electoral period for its universally elected Chamber, which is the European Parliament, and that then leads to the election of those who form the European Commission.

I hope that is helpful.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Yes, Madam Speaker, and can I ask him: are we closer now than we were to a conclusion when I asked this question last time a month ago?

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker, and to death probably as well.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Indeed! Madam Speaker, can I also ask him: apart from the unblocking of principles, which I imagine is still necessary because there are issues that remain to be negotiated, alongside that is there treaty drafting happening?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, yes, different sides are drafting different views of what the treaty should look like.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, but those drafts are being exchanged around a 'common draft treaty', or have we not reached that stage yet?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I would not want to venture to say that we have a draft treaty.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I understand that and I am going to ask the question, but if the hon. Member feels that he cannot answer it, I understand it and then perhaps we can have a discussion behind the Speaker's Chair.

What I was really asking is: while there might not be a whole template that is going around, are there at least parts of the treaty that are being exchanged between parties, or are parties just simply keeping their drafts to themselves?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I would not say that parties are keeping their drafts to themselves, but I would say that parties *have* their drafts. That is not to say that anything is agreed and this is progressing on the basis that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed; and I do not think it is useful, at this stage, for me to say more, but there is nothing or very little that

could be shared by way of *agreed* text that we know is going to be the text that will surface in the event of there being an agreement.

395 That is why I have indicated to the hon. Member that I anticipate that things will get much more intense in coming weeks, because as you get towards the end that is when the text is going to have to be crystallised into what will be the agreed text. One side's view of what the text should say and another side's view of what the text should say, will have to become a common view of what the text should say in respect of each part, so that our view of how a particular chapter should be drafted will have to be accepted by the other side, and we might have to accept the
400 other side's view of how another chapter may have to be drafted.

Of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows and every Gibraltarian knows, in Gibraltar the issues are not just issues of principle. Even when you have got over an issue of principle, how you write something down can give rise to 20 more new issues of principle. Indeed, in some contexts, just whether we talk about an issue or issues, plural or singular, is an issue of principle and so he knows
405 as well as I do how devilishly difficult the detail can be.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask, finally, Madam Speaker, given the imminence of the European Parliament elections and notwithstanding what has been said about the possibility of crystallising either towards the end of March or hopefully in April, because obviously that election
410 involves MEPs and so on – and he is negotiating with the EU and the UK and so on, and Spanish parties – does he envisage that the talks would continue if there is no agreement by April, right up to the time of the European Parliament elections?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, it is not for nothing that I said during the course of my New Year's message that this was a time for patience and stoic calm, because we cannot allow
415 another party's timetable to determine whether or not a negotiation which is important to Gibraltar, should or should not continue.

As far as we are concerned, unfortunately, because 96% of us voted to remain, we no longer vote in European parliamentary elections, we are negotiating with the European Union, and the
420 European Union continues whether or not its parliament is dissolved and its Commission changes.

So as far as the Government of Gibraltar is concerned, I cannot speak for the Government of the United Kingdom but the indication given to us, of course, is the same, but I would not pretend to stand here and speak for the United Kingdom. But the Government of Gibraltar – as far as we are concerned, and we believe the Government of the United Kingdom – would be ready to
425 continue with a new European Commission and with a new European Parliament to negotiate that which we might not have been able to agree before a European parliamentary election; as is the case in the context of our discussions and negotiations with the United Kingdom, in the context of whatever may be on the table when a general election is called in the UK or indeed when general elections have been called elsewhere.

430 If the Government changes in the same way as if the Commission changes, you might have a different dynamic, you may be more advanced in some areas and further set back in other areas. So we are not going to be the ones to get up off the table simply because the time has come for a Europe-wide election to be held.

But I do want to want to say, Madam Speaker, given the hon. Gentleman has said this is his last
435 supplementary on the subject, because he referred to the fact that there had been some exchanges with Bill Cash, etc., that none of the things that Sir Bill was saying – and I am always grateful for his attitude in wanting to ensure scrutiny of Gibraltar matters from the European Scrutiny Committee – none of the things that Sir Bill is saying should have caught anyone by surprise in Gibraltar. I am sure they did not catch him by surprise.

440 Indeed I am surprised that some of them appear to have caught Sir Bill by surprise because I have gone back and looked at *my* evidence before that Committee and I had already said that there was going to be a Schengen border at Gibraltar Airport and the issue was how it was going

to be managed. I have already said, on a number of occasions, that we would be aligning closely with the European rules in some respects.

445 Nobody has ever talked about UK/Spain joint management of the Airport, that would not be agreed by a Government of Gibraltar. So patience and stoic calm and whatever the outcome of the negotiations by the time that the European Commission and Parliament are dissolved, if we have not been able to conclude an agreement we would be happy to continue with whoever takes over, if whoever takes over is happy to continue to talk to us.

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Q359/2024

Employees on sick leave, continued

Madam Speaker: We will come back now to Question 359. Does the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus have any Supplementaries?

455 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for the provision of the table.

Just looking at the figures, and I am by no means an accountant, but if one looks at the figures at the commencement of – I am looking at the Royal Gibraltar Police figures – if one starts 2019 to 2021, you note that the figures there at the highest there were 50-odd police officers on sick leave. Thereafter, from 2021 onwards, we see an upward trend, an alarming rise I would say, because the figures come to the 90s at their highest.

460 The most recent report – and I have to refer to it because I think it is relevant – from the Police Federation still suggests that a lot of officers have low morale.

Does the Hon. Chief Minister believe that this has anything to do with the amount of sick leave that has been taken? Because the numbers are concerning, not least because back in October there were 34 missing from the RGP contingent.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I am always going to be concerned if a number of officers are on sick leave because it may not just be related to morale, it may be related to something that is happening at work. I do not know whether there was a particularly big brawl on one occasion and officers were struck and had to be off, etc. But the hon. Lady can look at the numbers and can see how they develop over time.

470 She is making a correlation that may or may not be relevant and I think it is almost to ask me to do crystal-ball gazing. For example, in April 2022 and March 2022 I can tell her there were almost 7% of officers on sick leave. In October 2023 there were 3.3% on sick leave. In January 2024 and December 2023 it was 5.7% and 5.3%, and then down to 3.7% in February 2024.

475 So you can look at these numbers and see how the numbers increase, how they come down. In terms of seminal moments in the history of the RGP, given the things that the hon. Members keep banging on about, in June 2020 it was 0.8%, in July 1% and in August 0.8% and then it goes up a little, comes down a little.

480 In the ambulance service, Madam Speaker, we had I think at one stage – let me just have a quick look – almost 8% sick leave in February 2022 and 1% or 2% the following month. Some of these things may be related to flu, they may be related to people taking more sick days in January and in December than they do in other months; and it seems to be something which is difficult to relate in particular to a survey or not a survey. I would say that is to try and reach a conclusion is to speculate when you can look at numbers in all of the other services that the hon. Lady has referred to, and find examples of higher percentage of absenteeism as a result of sick leave in any one month than she has pointed me to in those particular months. So I do not think that she can make the extrapolated conclusions she is intending to make.

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490 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can I just ask the hon. Member where he is getting his statistical correlations from because looking, with my poor eyesight, at the list on the Royal Gibraltar Police and there are figures in the 70s and 80s, that to me just on a rough calculation, it just seems to me that is almost like 25% of the force or something like that.

495 So I am not sure where he is getting this 7% or 3% or 2% in relation to *what*. Is it on a specific day? Because these numbers look much higher in terms of a percentage of the total force, if these are police officers. If there are 70 or 80 on sick leave in a particular month is he giving us a statistic for the day or is he giving us a statistic for the month? And if it is for the month, how does this make sense in terms of the table he has provided, which suggests that the 70 or 80 employees in the RGP, at any given month on sick leave, when they have got perhaps about 300 officers?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, they asked for it on the basis of a monthly statistic, so they have been told the number of people who have been off sick in that month. It does not mean that they are all off sick for the whole month; and therefore if it is 290 police officers and 70 people off would mean one quarter of the force was not available for the whole of January. 505 But that is not the case. They have asked for it monthly, they have got the numbers that have been off sick in that month, but maybe one of them has been off for half a day, another one has been off for a day, etc.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, so by that answer that it might be that we have asked for a monthly figure so in the month, for example, there is 80 employees, 80 officers off sick, or another month 70 or 86 or whatever, 90. So that suggests that almost a quarter or a third of police officers are on sick leave every single month. Isn't that right?

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, perhaps yes, perhaps it does suggest that, but not for more than a day, for example, in some instances; and the figure is not too different in Customs, where you have a lower base where you have 170 people, but you have a figure of up to 40 in some months.

You have the same in Borders and Coastguard where the complement is 129 and you might have 37, almost 40, in one month, 38 in another, 45 in another. So you have got a third who are off in any one month, and the same may be true in the ambulance. Which leads me to the conclusion, Madam Speaker, it is probably true in respect of every Department. Because when I have had this looked at in preparation for today, I am told that there is nothing outstanding or extraordinary in respect of the absenteeism figure for sick leave in any of these Departments compared to the other Government Departments; because if you are looking at a Department and you are saying how many people have been off sick in any month, you look at them all and they may all have been sick once.

525 For example, if the hon. Gentleman asked in respect of my Department where we might be 20 on my floor, in January how many people were off sick? The answer might be 20, because they might all have taken a day because there was a lot of flu at that time and it was laying people low. 530 So you would say to me: how can a Department with 20 people have 20 people off? You were empty for January.

Well, no, one of us was off at least one day in January and that is the way that the hon. Members have asked us to do the figures. We have been able to do it. I suppose we would give them every day if we had nothing else to do other than to satisfy their desire for statistics. 535 We could probably sit down and break it down day by day, but I venture to say that the answer I would get from the Civil Service if I asked for that would be to say that that answer was too laborious for them to be able to provide in the time available, or indeed at all.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the answer. Just one further question and I do take this opportunity, before I did not state it, but I take this opportunity to congratulate the recruits from the RGP who actually passed out this morning.

So, just one further question: does the Hon. Chief Minister feel that we have enough within the contingents of these individual Departments to ensure disruption is kept to a minimum and to keep the services running?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, these Departments which have been highlighted – the Royal Gibraltar Police, the Borders and Coastguard Agency, HM Customs, the Ambulance Service, the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service and the Prison are all Departments where we have increased the complement considerably in the time that we have been elected. Considerably. And we have been attacked by hon. Members opposite for increasing the cost of the public sector.

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We have increased the cost of the public sector by putting public sector wages up, when we have not been facing public finance problems as a result of the pandemic; and we have increased the cost of the public sector by increasing the number of people employed in the public sector. We have been told by hon. Members opposite on a number of occasions that they consider the public sector is bloated.

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So, Madam Speaker, in that context, having increased the complement of each of these Departments by more than these Departments ever had available to them in the time that they were in office, and then having faced their criticism for having increased the public sector, I think that these Departments know that the Government has been prepared to listen to them when they have said that they do not have the resources.

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We have not always been able to give every Department head everything that they ask for. And I caution hon. Members to not go down the route of pretending that if they were in Government they would give every head of Department the number of people that they would be asking for. Because I can guarantee the hon. Lady that she would find that every Department head would come and tell her that they need *double the number of people that they have already*.

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But having said that, what is important is that we do not just congratulate the recruits today we congratulate the people who run the Royal Gibraltar Police, HM Customs, the Ambulance Service, the BCA, the Prison Service and all of the other public sector Departments for the magnificent work that the public sector does in Gibraltar day in, day out. Because there are many who criticise the public sector, there are many who criticise law enforcement, but they should all remember that when the pandemic struck it was the public sector that kept Gibraltar going and that kept Gibraltar safe.

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Madam Speaker: Yes.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Would the Hon. Chief Minister be able to clarify whether or not these figures on the Police Force, which may possibly correlate with a similar level of sickness levels across the board, there is, nonetheless, a distinct jump between the first two years and the second two-and-a-bit years of almost doubling the amount of sick leave?

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Has anyone within any Department looked into why there was this sudden jump and disparity, and has it anything to do with the survey on morale etc., within the force?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I really do not understand how the hon. Gentleman, and indeed the hon. Lady who asked the same question, thinks that it is possible to reach a conclusion (*Interjection*) for such a subjective proposition. The hon. Gentleman says from a sedentary position, that that is not his question but that is exactly what he has asked.

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He has asked whether somebody else, not me, has been able to reach the conclusion that the hon. Lady has asked me whether I can reach and I said, 'Look, I do not think you can reach that conclusion.' And I have said, 'If you look at the rates, they are more or less the rates that you expect in other places.'

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The Commissioner of Police has said that we have had issues in the Royal Gibraltar Police, he said so publicly on television and on radio. Is that manifesting itself in sick leave? Are the things

595 that we are reading in the Federation's surveys, something about morale, something that we are seeing manifest in the statistics? Well, maybe.

As a layperson, I might even be tempted to say probably but is it statistically, empirically provable that one is leading to the other? And can a third party reach that conclusion, which is what the hon. Gentleman has asked me? Well, no, Madam Speaker, because one is *objective* and the other is *subjective*, so you cannot marry those two. You just cannot.

600 And so the hon. Gentleman can ask me again if he likes, in another way, but I am going to give him the same answer.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER

Q358/2024

**Current parcel Post Office –
Using Rooke site or another purpose**

Clerk: Questions to the Deputy Chief Minister.
605 Question 358/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, will the site of the current parcel post office be absorbed into the development of the Rooke site, or be used for another purpose?

610 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia): Madam Speaker, the site of the current parcel post office will not be absorbed into the development of the Rooke sites. It will be part of the location of the new fire station.
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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, this is a fire station that will be paid by the developer of the Rooke site. Is that right?

Hon. Dr J J Garcia: The cost of the fire station was covered by the premium paid by the developer of the Rooke sites.
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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Are there now developed plans for that fire station, and if so when does the Government expect a tender, presumably, to issue for the works for that site?

625 **Hon. Deputy Chief Minister:** So, Madam Speaker, there is a draft concept design, which I understand has been cleared with the management at the fire station, but the first step before there is a tender would entail the project going to planning, going to the DPC first.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Although the cost was covered by the premium, this is a project that will be run by the Government, presumably, and the tender will issue from the Government?
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Hon. Deputy Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

JUSTICE, TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Q335/2024

Offices designated for Probation and Community –
Current locations; working from home

635 **Clerk:** Justice, Trade and Industry Questions.
Question 335/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide clarification on where the offices designated
640 for Probation and Community offices are: a) currently located; b) whether all Probation and
Community offices are working from these premises or working from home?

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

Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, due to the
645 dynamic workload of the Probation Team and the Community Service Officer they have always
conducted all client interviews at the offices of 16 Governor's Parade.

Probation Officers also have a designated office within the Gibraltar Court Service. Given the
nature of their work they are also able to undertake administrative work; for example, writing
650 reports from home. They also participate in meetings and training online.

With regard to the Community Service Officer's role, the overall majority of the work is
undertaken outside of the office environment working in the community.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the hon. Member confirm what senior management structure is in place
655 to confirm that those on probation and community service are seen face-to-face and are receiving
adequate support?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, that is not a Supplementary to the question that was asked,
that is an entirely new question. If the hon. Lady gave me notice of that question and tabled notice
660 of that question, I would have endeavoured to have the information here today, but it is not a
Supplementary to the question that she has asked.

The question was very specific and it was with regard to *where* the relevant officers discharged
their working duties.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q336/2024

Health care insurance disabled challenges –
New and/or separate schemes

665 **Clerk:** Question 336/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Considering the significant challenges faced by individuals with disabilities
and/or pre-existing conditions in obtaining health care insurance, particularly when travelling to
Spain and incurring high premiums, would the Hon. Minister contemplate incorporating
670 provisions within the newly proposed scheme, or alternatively to establish a separate scheme to
address the needs of these individuals?

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

675 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, as the Government stated in its press release dated 8th March 2024, we will review if the scheme can be extended in terms of eligibility, age and geographical location in six months.

680 **Madam Speaker:** Any supplementary? Next question.

Q337-39/2024
Firearms licences in Gibraltar –
Current numbers; bespoke database cost; RGP up to date and accurate

Clerk: Question 337/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

685 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm how many people currently hold firearms licences in Gibraltar?

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

690 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 338-339.

Clerk: Question 338/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

695 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the RGP have a bespoke database which has been created solely for firearms licensing? And if not, why? If it does have a bespoke database, what was the cost of its development and implementation?

Clerk: Question 339/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

700 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm whether all records held by the RGP in respect of firearms licences are up to date and accurate?

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

705 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, the RGP's current system holds 501 records that combines 'in-force' and 'revoked' licences. Providing a response that distinguishes between both categories outlined will require a manual exercise to reconcile this data with the hard copies of such records.

The RGP confirms that its current licensing records are up to date. The accuracy of records held is dependent upon a number of factors, including the data provided by applicants. Personal information already held is verified during the licensing renewal process.

710 The RGP has a database of firearms licensing records. This is not a bespoke system. The RGP has explored a number of options to update or replace the current IT solution, including modifications to the 'Personal History' module of the Integrated Criminal Justice System, a bespoke firearms module with the same IT platform and a bespoke commercial IT solution.

715 The RGP continues to explore options for a cost-efficient IT solution with which to replace the current system.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the answer. I am just going to break each of those into different questions.

720 In respect of whether the RGP has a bespoke database, in the Auditor's reports 2016-17 and 2017-18 at page 233, the Commissioner had stated that having a bespoke database created solely for firearms licensing, so that was happening at the time according to that, and that if it was achieved they would be able to streamline the process and have a more efficient working procedure.

725 It seems, given that you cannot distinguish between those licences that are in force and those licences which have been revoked, that that procedure has not yet been achieved. Does the Hon. Minister expect that the new system he has spoken of will deliver that streamlining and that efficiency?

730 **Hon. N Feetham:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

Hon. J Ladislaus: We have not yet heard, and I did ask it, at what cost to the Taxpayer?

Hon. N Feetham: I do not have that information immediately available to me, Madam Speaker.

735

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that answer. I did ask it in the question that I submitted and I would be grateful if it could possibly be provided to me in writing.

Hon. N Feetham: I will do.

740

Thank you very much.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask for clarification, the hon. Member says there are 501 people on the records who either have a licence in force or a revoked one. So is it not possible for the RGP to give a figure at any given moment on how many people in Gibraltar have a valid renewed licence?

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So for me to understand his answer – because I think the answer to that is not given what he said, it is simple enough, at least on the face of his answer – but can I just understand because he may know the mechanics more than I do after discussion with the RGP? If someone walks into the RGP and has been arrested with a firearm, is there no easy computerised way of checking whether someone has a firearm licence or not?

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Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the information that I have available to me in terms of supplementary information is that the existing legislation does not oblige applicants to provide the RGP with updates to changes to personal information at any time other than at application or renewal. That information relating to changes of firearms and ammunition is notified to the police and verified as part of the licensing process; and that is part of the process the RGP have, over the years, introduced residential and premises inspections to verify the firearm and ammunitions held by licensees, as well as the storage of arrangement.

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That is the information that was made available to me by way of supplementary information. If there are more specific questions, I am very happy to put that down in writing to you following this parliamentary session.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: That would be helpful, perhaps once he understands our concerns.

So again just pulling the thread from what he said, the renewal process: is this an annual renewal process, does the Minister know? So what I am asking is, because there is a renewal process, because it was in his original answer, so when people are renewing is there not a computerised log or list, which is the 2024 list which is kept so that there can be easy verification because he suggested in his original answer, I cannot really tell without there being a manual check, which suggests that there is not a list kept?

765

770 If the overall figure is 501 of in force and revoked, and revoked contains historic figures, surely the number of people holding actual renewed firearm licences would not be such a long list, so it would be possible to produce one if one is not available now.

775 So I am asking really two questions: (1) is there not a list in existence for the calendar year of the renewal; and (2) if not – and he has explained in his answer to the supplementary just now that there is no requirement, for example, to ask for particulars, etc. – are there regulations that he needs to look at that he would be looking at to try to improve the system?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I will have to come back to the hon. Member.

780 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q340/2024
RGP British Gibraltar territorial waters –
Daily patrols and times

Clerk: Question 340/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

785 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, are there daily patrols by the RGP of British Gibraltar territorial waters; and if so are patrols conducted at all hours of the day?

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

790 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, the RGP marine patrols of British Gibraltar Territorial Waters do not operate under a defined schedule. Patrols are conducted based on a combination of factors including, but not limited to, Gibraltar's threat level, intelligence reports under Marine Strategic Threat and Risk Assessment.

795 It would not be sensible in the public interest to disclose to potential bad actors any aspect of how, when and why patrols are conducted.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful. I can understand the concern behind that and I would be grateful if the Hon. Minister would agree to, perhaps, a conversation behind the Chair on this matter.

800 **Hon. N Feetham:** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, thank you.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q341-44/2024
Replacing Magistrates Courts database and Criminal Justice System –
Progress updates; completion date

Clerk: Question 341/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

805 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Hon. Minister provide an update as to the progress which has been made in replacing the Magistrates Courts computer database and in relation to the development of the proposed Integrated Criminal Justice System in respect to the Magistrates Courts and when the project is expected to be completed?

810 **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 this question together with Questions 342 to 344.

815 **Clerk:** Question 342/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, has work commenced on the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal phases relating to the Integrated Criminal Justice Database. If not, when is work expected to commence and by when are those projects expected to be completed?

820

Clerk: Question 343/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, with regard to the Integrated Criminal Justice System in relation to the Royal Gibraltar Police, can the Hon. Minister confirm whether the following outstanding tasks have now been completed and if not an estimated date of completion?

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- Getting the investigation prosecution agencies forward in terms of full case management
- Getting the probation module live with their application
- Getting the road traffic collisions application live
- Getting the firearms module live
- Assistance to the RGP in getting the property application configured and tested, and
- Demonstrations of the latest technology platform and the receipt of feedback.

830

Clerk: Question 344/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

835

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister provide an update as to how much has been spent on the Integrated Criminal Justice System project to date, to include the cost for all Departments benefiting from the software?

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

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, with regard to the Magistrates Court, despite meetings between the Gibraltar Court Service and the software developers, there has not been much progress as the solutions offered have not been able to deal with the court processes adequately.

845

There are also other concerns raised by the judiciary which have not been resolved. Work has therefore not commenced on the Supreme Court and Court of Appeal phases, due to the more complex nature of these courts processes and the concerns raised by the judiciary.

I have been informed by the Gibraltar Courts' Service that they are satisfied with the existing Magistrates Court system, and as such there is in their view no need for this Integrated Criminal Justice System to include them. The total amount spent on the Integrated Criminal Justice System project to date is £3,544,042.89.

850

With respect to the Case Management module, the RGP uses the module to prepare charges and digital dockets. Development of other modules has not yet been completed; however, a working group has been established to update case preparation procedures. The use of the module will be expanded to include the digital storage of case management files.

855

The RGP platform does not include a probation module. The Probation Service has, however, confirmed that they have been integrated into the system and have requested several changes to the visual and functional layout, which requires changes to the software. They are awaiting notification that the changes have occurred.

860 With regard to the Road Traffic Collisions module, the system has been operational since April 2022. The Firearms module did not form part of the original configuration of the system. In respect of the Property module work on the lost and found property has been completed, subject to changes requested by the RGP to enable this aspect of the module to go live. The current target date for RGP testing of this part of the module is the 1st April 2024.

865 In respect of demonstrations of the latest technology platform and the receipt of feedback, this has not yet taken place.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Grateful. I am just looking at the figure spent in total and it is over £3.5 million. Given that the Auditor's report dates back, obviously, to 2016-17, why was the Magistrates Court module continued with if it was not going to be put into use?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I was not the Minister at the time. I do not have that information immediately available to me.

875 **Madam Speaker:** Any more Supplementaries?

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Can I just ask on the £3.5 million, so if I have understood the hon. Member's answer he said the Magistrates Court staff are happy with the system they have now having discussed it at length, so they are keeping their system. The Supreme Court and Court of Appeal work has not commenced because of concerns of the judiciary.

880 So what is the £3.5 million being spent on? Is that solely in relation to the RGP, or other things?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not have that breakdown of the figures at the moment with me.

885 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** So, would the hon. Member be willing to send us, perhaps, the breakdown of the spend of the £3.5 million, if he obtains it?

Hon. N Feetham: Yes, Madam Speaker.

890 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I just ask, before I give way to my hon. Colleague, he said that the work on the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal had not commenced because of concerns of the judiciary. Can he expand on that, what kind of concerns do the judiciary have in relation to this system?

895 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, there were ongoing concerns from the Chief Justice, which were never satisfactorily addressed by the developers as to the segregation of information held by the courts and the potential for it to be accessed by other justice stakeholders.

900 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the hon. Gentleman comment as to whether the system can be maintained by Government IT experts, or does this have to be maintained externally?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information available to me.

905 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q345/2024

**Principal Auditor's report –
ITO computer application's sole programmer reliance**

Clerk: Question 345/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise how it has addressed what the Principal Auditor's recent report in section 3.1.143 described as a, quote: 'serious weakness in
910 having the ITO computer application significantly reliant on one sole programmer who is based in
the United Kingdom', end quote.

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

915 Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham): Madam Speaker, the statement
made by the Principal Auditor in his recent report reflects the position at the time under which
the Income Tax Office had a high degree of dependency on the UK programmer.

HM Government of Gibraltar had already identified the significant risk posed to the integrity
and continuity of such important IT systems and has subsequently implemented various strategies
920 and solutions in order to regularise this; namely the implementation of a permanent contract with
the UK programmer and the employment of two IT officers who are being trained with a view of
ensuring local specialised succession planning.

Hon R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am glad to hear those steps are being taken by the Income
925 Tax Office as the Minister has just set out. Can I ask the Minister: the programme the Income Tax
Office is using, is this a programme that is owned by a third party or is it a bespoke in-house
developed programme that this external UK-based programme is effectively maintaining?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I do not have that information available to me at present.
930

Hon R M Clinton: Well, will the Minister be able to at least, or does the Minister know whether
the ITO, the Income Tax Office system, is an off-the-shelf purchased system or one that was
developed specifically for the Income Tax Office?

935 Hon. N Feetham: I do not, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q346/2024

**Admiralty Marshal Sub-Fund –
Omitted in error in Gibraltar Courts Service returns**

Clerk: Question 346/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

940 Hon R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide the missing information in
respect of the Admiralty Marshal Sub-Fund for the financial years 2013-14, 2014-15 and 2015-16
which is noted by the Principal Auditor in section 3.6.2, as omitted in error in returns by the
Gibraltar Courts Service?

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

950 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, information relating to monies held on deposit by the Admiralty Marshal for financial years 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16 had not been provided by the office of the Admiralty Marshal to the Treasury. The office of the Admiralty Marshal has ascertained that there were nil deposits at each of the relevant financial year ends, namely 2014, 2015 and 2016. This represents the missing information as noted by the Principal Auditor.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q347-48/2024
Income Tax and Company Tax collected –
January 2024 and February 2024

955 **Clerk:** Question 347/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amount of Income Tax collected in each of the following months: January 2024 and February 2024?

960 **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 this question together with Question 348.

965 **Clerk:** Question 348/2024. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the amount of Company Tax collected in each of the following months: January 2024 and February 2024?

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

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the amount of Income Tax collected for the months of January and February 2024 are as follows: Month January 2024, £28.96 million; February 2024, £20.44 million.

975 The amount of Company Tax collected for the months of January and February 2024 are as follows: Month January 2024, £3.12 million; February 2024 £38.8 million.

Madam Speaker: I beg your pardon? (*Interjection*) All right. We will return to 348 for any Supplementaries in a little while. Next question.

Q349-350/2024
Post Office parcel facility –
Current Government support

980 **Clerk:** Question 349. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Government supportive of the Post Office parcel facility as currently designed?

985 **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 this question together with Question 350.

990 **Clerk:** Question 350/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Who will be paying for the relocation of the Parcel Post Office and what is the envisaged cost?

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

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the Government is fully supportive of the current design of the new Post Office parcel post facility. This has been designed in full consultation and agreement with the Royal Gibraltar Post Office management. This will be a modern, purpose-built facility that meets all the requirements to be able to deliver the necessary services now and into the future.

1000

The relocation of the Parcel Post Office will be a Government-led project. It will be paid for by the Government. The project will be put out to tender and it is, therefore, not in the Government's best interest to give an indication of the estimated cost.

1005

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, as far as the Supplementary to my question, which is 349, the question focused on the design and the Hon. the Minister refers to consultation which he has conducted with the management of the Gibraltar Post Office. But I was more concerned about wider considerations and consultation and in that context I think we have exhausted, in previous questions yesterday in this House, the issues in relation to parking spaces.

1010

But can he give any consolation to those bicycle users from the design that I have seen, although the description suggests that a wider pavement will be allowed for, is there a consideration to allow for bicycle traffic to utilise that along that pavement? As I understand from the answers we have had previously this afternoon, there is going to be a cycle lane opposite, but I wonder whether that is being taken care of by the cycle lane opposite and will not be considered for the pavement by the Post Office as currently designed?

1015

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): If I may assist, Madam Speaker, the plan – and the plans are being developed and designed now – is that there will be a bicycle lane on each side of the road.

1020

Hon. D J Bossino: So just to be absolutely clear, this is Bishop Caruana Road and the intention is for there to be a cycle lane on the east side and indeed on the west side, which is where this structure is going to be built. It is just that it was not clear from, at least, the blurb that was produced in support of the application.

1025

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, that is correct. I think I referred to that yesterday in one of my answers.

Madam Speaker: Any Supplementaries to 350? Next question.

1030

Q351-52/2024

**Europe India Gateway Red Sea cable –
Gibtelecom financial or technical complications**

Clerk: Question 351/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, what are the financial or technical implications for Gibtelecom of any damage caused to the Europe India Gateway cable in the Red Sea?

1035

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 this question together with Question 352.

1040

Clerk: Question 352/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Has the Government discussed with or been informed by Gibtelecom as to the reports of damage to the Europe India Gateway cable in the Red Sea?

1045

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

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the Europe India Gateway Consortium, of which Gibtelecom is a founding member, has a budget for the maintenance of the cable system and can deal with any faults. Additional costs may be applicable for repair options which will be shared amongst the members of the consortium.

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As such, there are no additional financial or technical costs for the company associated with any damage to the Europe India Gateway cable, whether in the Red Sea or elsewhere. Within the Red Sea Maintenance Zone of the Europe India Gateway the repairs are being conducted by E-Marine, a subsidiary of the Etisalat Group.

1055

Gibtelecom has not briefed the Government on the cable break of the Europe India Gateway cable crossing the Red Sea. Cable cuts are not unusual and frequently happen all around the world. As such, consortiums like the Europe India Gateway join maintenance zones with repair vessels whose purpose is to restore cut cables as quickly and efficiently as possible.

1060

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So the hon. Member has said that they have got a budget for maintenance and then that any additional costs are shared out between the participants. One of the participants would be Gibtelecom, but he then says that there will be no cost.

But presumably at this stage, the repairs being conducted, he is not in a position really to say that there will be no cost because he does not know whether the costs will be absorbed by the existing budget for maintenance given that he also says that any additional costs would be shared by participants in the scheme. So I am just asking for clarification. Or is it that he *is* in a position to say that the estimate of costs will be absorbed within the current maintenance budget?

1065

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, I can only restate the answer that I have given. These questions were put to Gibtelecom, clearly they are in the position to be able to provide the Government with the information. The information that they have provided is precisely what I have read out.

1070

I cannot elaborate more than what I have been given, but I am happy to go back. If the hon. Member raises more specific questions in relation to the information that I have given, I am very happy to go back to Gibtelecom and write to the hon. Member and clarify any points that he seeks clarification on today.

1075

1080 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Well, I thought I had asked a very specific question. My very specific original question was, 'What are the financial technical implications for Gibtelecom?' And he says there is a budget for maintenance, then there are additional costs that will be shared among the participants.

1085 So because I have asked about the financial and technical implications and he says he has put those things to Gibtelecom, I would have thought that he would have had more information provided by Gibtelecom as to the estimate of costs, whether it would be absorbed within the budget maintenance; and if not, to what extent would the contribution of Gibtelecom be?

1090 So if he wants more specific questions, really that is what I am talking about but I thought that they came within the ambit of my original question. So I would ask him, if he may, to ask specifically, he has indicated that Gibtelecom has not briefed the Government – well, not briefed the Government formally, although he has indicated he has been in touch with Gibtelecom about these questions. So will he be in touch with Gibtelecom on these other matters and perhaps he can write to me on that matter?

1095 **Hon. N Feetham:** I will do, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q353-54/2024

**Gibraltar's removal from FATF grey list –
Legislative steps, wider support, resources to secure change of status**

Clerk: Question 353/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1100 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, do the Government envisage taking any legislative or other steps or strengthening wider support or resources to ensure that Gibraltar's removal from the FATF grey list is maintained?

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

1105 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 354.

Clerk: Question 354/2024. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1110 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Do the Government envisage taking any steps following the removal of Gibraltar from the FATF grey list so as to ensure the wider industry awareness outside of our shores on this change of status?

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

1115 **Hon. N Feetham:** Madam Speaker, as Members of the Council of Europe body, Moneyval, Gibraltar will continue to undergo a peer review process of how it meets the FATF standards. Gibraltar was last assessed in December 2019 and the next Moneyval evaluation has already been scheduled to take place in April 2027.

1120 Whilst this may seem like a long time away, preparations are already in hand with stakeholder authorities to ensure that Gibraltar is able to keep up with the evolving international standards. As Minister with responsibilities for Justice, Trade and Industry, Madam Speaker, I chair a Steering Committee that considers all aspects of our preparedness in this respect.

1125 The Steering Committee meets formally every month and consists of the following stakeholder
authorities: National Co-ordinator for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of
Terrorism; The Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit; The Office of Criminal Prosecutions and
Litigation; The Royal Gibraltar Police; HM Customs Gibraltar.

And each of the four supervisory authorities: the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission; the
Gaming Commissioner; Legal Services Regulatory Authority; and the Office of Fair Trading.

1130 The Registrar of Ultimate Beneficial Owners and the Income Tax Office also form part of this
Committee, together with staff from my Ministry.

Madam Speaker, another group, an Interagency Working Group meets every two weeks to
identify issues that may need to be escalated to the Steering Committee, as well as identify
workflows and legislative improvements that may be required going forward.

1135 International co-operation is a key aspect of an evaluation process, and again each of the
agencies are ensuring that there is sharing of good practices with our counterparts in other
jurisdictions. We also take a lot of learning away when participating in international fora, which
can then be applied locally.

1140 With regard to the second question, Madam Speaker, immediately upon Gibraltar being
delisted by the FATF, I wrote to the Finance Centre Council and attached a letter for circulation by
the Finance Centre Council to its constituent Members and to be distributed more broadly among
their networks, to update them on the change of status and increase awareness outside Gibraltar.

1145 Upon subsequently receiving the official confirmation letter from the President of the FATF
confirming that Gibraltar had been white listed, I did the same. My Ministry intends to engage
with the local industry to discuss how we can undertake initiatives to market Gibraltar and how
best to take advantage of the current position.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I think we welcome the latter part – not that I do not welcome the rest of
it – but I certainly welcome the latter part in relation to the second question, which is the
1150 engagement with the industry in respect of what can be done to disseminate this information.
Because the Hon. Minister will understand the point when I say that, of course, the grey listing
was damaging and bad news gets out there, but to recover the position takes time.

1155 So it is not just simply a question of being relisted, white listed, by the FATF there needs to be
an effort to put out information. So we welcome what he has said and in relation to all the other
information he has provided in his answer.

Can I just ask specifically two things, if I may, while I am on my feet?

1160 First of all, he has given us the composition of the Steering Committee that he chairs, which
I am grateful for. Is this a new Committee that has been created since, for example, what
happened with the grey listing? Is it new Committee? Is he aware it is a new Committee? How
often does it meet?

1165 And can I just ask, because he gave us quite a long explanation about the meetings that are
being held to *monitor* the situation, but did not indicate whether any legislative steps are
necessary. Is he satisfied that as things stand today – obviously things may change – but as things
stand today, no legislation needs to change to underpin this effort?

Hon. N Feetham: Madam Speaker, the Steering Committee and the Interagency Working
Group were there already and were set up by my predecessor, Albert Isola. I have been, obviously,
actively involved since we were elected on 12th October.

1170 With regard to whether or not the Government expects there to be any legislative changes,
the answer is of course there are bound to be legislative changes that would come about for one
simple reason, Madam Speaker, and I would direct the hon. Member to the latest
recommendations made by the FATF just two days ago with regard to the register of Ultimate
Beneficial Owners and that, I am told and advised, will require certain possible legislative
amendments in Gibraltar.

1175 To the extent that these are early days, I am absolutely certain that work will need to be done that we will identify areas where we will be required to make legislative amendments for no reason other than that the FATF standards are evolving, and therefore to the extent that something comes out which member states will need to implement into National Law, that will clearly also include Gibraltar.

1180

Madam Speaker: Right. I will come back now to Question 348 and ask the Hon. Mr Clinton whether he has any Supplementaries?

Q348/2024
Income Tax and Company Tax collected –
Supplementaries

Hon R M Clinton: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

1185 In respect to Question 348, if I may ask the Minister the number you gave for Company Tax collected in February 2024 was £38.8 million, if I heard him correctly. I would just ask him whether there is anything in that number that is out of the ordinary because if we were to go back to previous years – 2023 was about £26 million, the year before that £31 million, the year before that £29 million.

1190 Is there any exceptional tax receipt or Company Tax receipts that he has information on for the month of February 2024?

1195 **Minister for Justice, Trade and Industry (Hon. N Feetham):** Madam Speaker, in relation to the Company Tax collected in January and February of the previous year, this is the supplementary information that I have in front of me. For January 2023 that was £4 million, so what we are saying is – yes, £4.05 million; and for February 2023 the information that I have available to me in front of me is that that figure was £37.59 million. So we are talking about a difference of £37.59 million *versus* the £38.8 million.

It is not a significant difference in numbers, is it?

1200 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, it would appear that we have different numbers. The numbers that I was quoting from last year were numbers that the Chief Minister's Office had provided to us and it would appear that your numbers are different to the ones that we were given last year, but obviously it may be that the number I have for March will be then lower if he has an element of overlap. So I think we will leave it and we will wait and see what the number is for March.

1205

Thank you.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE SAVINGS BANK

Q355-56/2024
General Sinking Fund balance –
1st February 2024

1210 **Clerk:** Questions to the Hon. Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank. Question 355. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following date, being 1st February 2024?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Question 356.

1220

Clerk: Question 356. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government please provide the total gross debt, aggregate debt, after application of Sinking Fund to gross debt, cash reserves and net debt figures for public debt for the following date being the 1st February 2024?

1225

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the General Sinking Fund, gross debt and aggregate debt for January 2024 were at the same level as December 2023. The cash reserves and net debt figures were as follows: on 1st February cash reserves £73.2 million; net debt £771.6 million.

1230

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q357/2024

Rooke site residential home project – Original borrowing from the Savings Bank

Clerk: Question 357/2024. The Hon. D J Bossino.

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Hon. D J Bossino: What was the original borrowing from the Savings Bank in respect of the residential home project at the Rooke site?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank.

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Minister for Inward Investment and the Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, the original funding provided by the Savings Bank in respect of the residential home project at Rooke site was £2 million.

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Hon. D J Bossino: I expected the figure to be higher, Madam Speaker. So could the –
(*Interjection*)

Madam Speaker: Put the question.

1250

Hon. D J Bossino: [*inaudible*] and... Could the magic be in the words 'original borrowing'? So can I press the Hon. Minister further and ask him: what further lendings have been made by the Savings Bank in respect of this particular project, beyond the initial £2 million?

1255

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Beyond the official £2 million, the £2 million was in 2021, so in the following years further borrowing took place depending on the level of work ... As the project has progressed and the amount of money that was needed to finance it has been funded by the Savings Bank purchasing loan notes.

1260 So for example, the actual modules from China were expected to come in at about £20 million and in fact came in just under £18-plus million, and that was done in one payment. So there was about £2 million in the first year, then around £20 million for the modules and then the local part of the building to date has had about £16 million. So that would be about £38 million if you take the three figures that I have given him.

1265 The initial part went predominantly to architects, planning and getting planning permission, connections of electricity on the site and all that; and therefore there was in the middle the element that was imported from China and then there have been local contractors and something like 20 different local companies and suppliers that have had the last figure that I have given you.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I were to pose a slightly different question to the hon. Member, he will recall that this arose in the context of the supplementary questions that I was asking in the last session of the House. If I were to ask a specific question, he has been helpful in providing further information in respect of the beyond £2 million figure.

1270 But if I were to ask a specific question at the next meeting of the House, would he be in a position to provide us with specific amounts rather than a rough calculation of what, at that stage, would have been the current amounts in terms of the lending?

1275 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** If he puts a specific question, I will give him a specific answer.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful for that and also, if I may, if I can take him back to the question and answer session with aspects of this project at the last session, where he said that it would be possible that further calls would be made for financing in respect of this project. This was raised, Madam Speaker, if you will recall, in the context of delays in payments and he gave us a long explanation as to why that may or may not have been the case. But he did say that there may be a possibility of a further call of funds.

1280 So can I ask him whether there has been, since last month, a further call of funds? As I understand it, we are at the moment at £30 million, but does he expect that there will be a further call of funds as a result of the delays and the issues that we discussed at the last session?

1285 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** It is very difficult to know what to expect, because this is not a project that is being done by a single company. The fundamental element which was the modules, there was a price negotiated with the factory and that was a fixed price.

1290 For the work that is happening now we have different components that have to be done, which is in the traditional side of the building, this sourced in Gibraltar and predominantly the Gibraltar supplier is getting it from Spain.

1295 Some of these goods were expected to cost less and finally cost more. So I cannot predict whether they will need any more money because I am only at the end of providing the funding, I am not at the end of actually negotiating with the subcontractors the prices of different elements in the building.

Hon. D J Bossino: As far as the building is concerned and in the context of the loan amounts which have already been deployed as far as this project is concerned, does he continue to be satisfied that the building, I think he said on the last occasion, is in effect the security that the Government has for repayment of that loan?

1300 Is he satisfied that the building is in effect more than, at this stage, £30 million? Is that understanding and analysis correct?

1305 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, I can tell the hon. Member that before the election, I had a customer who was willing to pay £50 million for it.

1310 **Hon. D J Bossino:** But will there not be a concern, would he not agree with me, that should there be further calls or funds that he has, at this stage it seems, from a very rudimentary perspective; and based on the information that he has provided across the floor of the House for the last two meetings, headroom of about £20 million?

Is that analysis correct?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: I have not got any concerns now, Madam Speaker.

1315 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Procedural

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.
Question 304. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1320 **The Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Before the hon. Member continues, I think the hon. Lady is the last Minister who is going to be answering questions. So I wonder whether this might be the convenient moment to take the recess now and return at 5 p.m.?

Madam Speaker: All right. We will take a 15-minute recess and we will come back at 5 p.m.

The House recessed at 4.45 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 5.00 p.m.

HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q304/2024

Guardian ad litem services – Numbers/individuals on register

1325 **Clerk:** Question 304/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Regarding Question 129 of 2024, could the Minister clarify the following:

(a) Will the services of a *guardian ad litem* provided by the same individual in all 13 cases requiring the services since 2022, or by different individuals? If by different individuals, how many?

1330 (b) What is the current number of *guardian ad litem*s on the register as of the present date?

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

1335 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, of the 13 cases since 1st January 2022 to date, there are three *guardian ad litem*s on the list that have been appointed in 12 of the cases; with the Care Agency being appointed by the court on one occasion. At present, the Gibraltar Court Service has three persons on the *guardians ad litem* list.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q305/2024

**St Bernadette's Centre –
Initial plans engagement/discussions with architects**

1340 **Clerk:** Question 305/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide details on any engagement or discussions with architects regarding initial plans for a new facility to replace, enhance or extend St Bernadette's Centre? If so, could the Government furnish further details on this engagement?

1345

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 has been in discussions with architects from Gamma Architects Limited. Discussions have commenced on the current and future needs and demands of St Bernadette's resources. However, there has been no consultancy agreement signed with them to date.

1350

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the hon. Member elaborate on the possible location of this new facility or site?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the proposed new site is Commonwealth Park, the area where the Department of Education is currently based.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the hon. Member share any details on whether they are consulting with any stakeholders in relation to this project?

1360

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the process has commenced of discussions with the different stakeholders, in particular the current employees of the St Bernadette's Centre and all the stakeholders involved there. We are encouraging the architects to reach out to as many stakeholders as possible, so that everyone feeds into the discussions of what it is that they need in that space.

1365

Hon. A Sanchez: And will this be a Government project? Will this be a project that will be undertaken and funded for by the Government?

1370

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, at present that is the intention.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Minister elaborate on the different facilities that are going to be incorporated into this new site? Does she have any ideas or can she elaborate on the vision that is intended for this new site?

1375

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, at present I cannot elaborate on any details. What I can say is that we are engaging with the stakeholders that are presently providing the services at St Bernadette's in order to ensure that their needs are met.

1380

In terms of the vision, we currently have a site and the vision is obviously a bigger, better project to better provide for the needs of the users of the service.

Hon. A Sanchez: And in terms of the current St Bernadette's Centre site does the Government have any ideas for what will happen with that site and what that site will be used for?

1385

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we do not have any details to date on that. If the centre moves, the centre moves in its entirety to a new site. So St Bernadette's would not be in

the current site. But we have no idea what that plot would be used for, and I imagine that would be put out at a later date.

1390

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. D J Bossino: May I encourage the hon. Member to widen the consultation process to parents, if I may suggest that? To her, it may indeed be the case that is already happening or indeed the intention. But by way of specific question, although she says that she does not have much in the way of detail, given that there is a challenge – and there are many challenges in this area, not just in relation to these services which are provided, which I think in many respects are excellent – but also in terms of costs.

1395

But there is one specific area which is respite care, which is so very important, not just for the affected individual but also for the people around him or her and I think specifically for family members it is an incredibly important service. At the moment, as I understand it, there are very limited beds available. I think, I stand to be corrected, but the number is four and given that the hon. Member has said that she wishes to improve the service, in that specific context does she have an idea of how many beds this facility is likely to provide?

1400

I appreciate it is a specific question, but I think it would be useful for all of us to have that information available.

1405

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, first of all, thank you very much for the compliment on the services, I will take that with grace. What I would say is that at the moment, we are at the stage of looking at the floor plans and looking at how many metres squared we can actually fit in the service.

1410

So I do not have specifics on the number of rooms that will be provided for respite, for example, or the specifics on how the area will be laid out. What I can say is that we are looking at numerous different options, because there have been numerous families that have approached us with the issue of respite and we are looking at numerous different options of how that can be improved and increased, in fact.

1415

Hon. D J Bossino: And I appreciate that it is an incredible job that the public servants do in that particular facility in terms of the great amount of tension that there is because of the demand that there is on a very limited supply. But in that context, is she also considering the point that has been raised, I think, *ad nauseam* across the floor of the House, which is the increasing demands that there will be for this facility?

1420

I am sure it is a point that some of us will be discussing in the context of the Select Committee on Special Needs, but it is something which is certainly of grave concern on this side of the House, as I am sure it is on that side of the House, that there will be a greater demand flowing from – we can see already an indicator of the trouble ahead, so to speak, given the numbers – the huge influx that we have seen in St Martin's over the last two or three years.

1425

So can I ask her specifically whether this is being considered from a policy and political level by her?

1430

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, first of all, I do wish to reiterate that statement and to applaud the great work that many of these workers do. I spoke about it at the Care Agency Awards recently and I have to confess that I was not aware of the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes in different areas of the care agencies portfolio. So I do take that on and I do reiterate the thanks that we give these workers and the praise that we give these workers, because they do provide an incredible service.

1435

However, in order to answer the question specifically: yes, we are looking at future-proofing the facility and we are looking at numbers and the increase in numbers. So when I talk about looking at the floor plans and looking at the number of metres squared that we are dedicating to

1440 this, we are looking at the number of metres squared that we have now and what we need to increase that facility; what we need to increase that facility for different age groups and indeed what we would need to do in order to increase the capacity further in the future if that need is required.

So yes, we are looking at future-proofing it to increase the capacity as and when required.

1445

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, although the question is specifically in the context of St Bernadette's, are there also plans – because this arose yesterday in relation to Dr Giraldi Home and the services provided there – is the vision to unify those services in the same location or is Dr Giraldi going to be placed elsewhere?

1450

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the idea is to unify those services, to move the entire facility from where it is presently to Commonwealth Park and to have Dr Giraldi. That is the vision at present, it may change, it is not set in stone yet; but the vision, at present, is to set Dr Giraldi's alongside St Bernadette's in Commonwealth Park.

1455

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q306/2024

Mount Alvernia Residential Care Home – Number on waiting list

Clerk: Question 306/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1460

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide an update of the number of people currently on the waiting list for Mount Alvernia Residential Care Home?

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

1465

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the model of care delivered in the elderly residential services assesses individuals for bed suitability across all the ERS sites, not just Mount Alvernia. But the current waiting list for the ERS, not just Mount Alvernia, is 335 individuals.

1470

Hon. A Sanchez: Grateful for that answer. Would the hon. Member happen to know if one of the floors in Mount Alvernia Residential Care Home is currently under refurbishment?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Not to my knowledge, but I can ask and get back to you on that.

Madam Speaker: Any other Supplementaries?

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1480

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, if I may, in the context of the Rooke Residential Home, is the intention – and this arises from the question because it does deal specifically with Mount Alvernia. Given that this is a significant number, we are talking about 335 and I appreciate the hon. Lady talks about this is an ERS-wide response and not specific to Mount Alvernia, but is it the Government's intention to continue to receive people in the Mount Alvernia Residential Home? Is that the intention? Or will it be a stop to that in terms of new entrants to that particular facility?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: So, Madam Speaker, if I can just break down the numbers, because 335 seems like an awful lot but in fact if I break that down, there are 12 waiting to enter into Mount

1485 Alvernia or other ERS facilities that are deemed high priority. There are 65 that are over 90-years-old, but 230 out of that list are non-urgent cases that look to be re-housed in Mount Alvernia.

So these individuals may have placed their names on the waiting list for a raft of different reasons. I think it is important to break down those numbers. But in direct answer to the question: yes, it is the aim of Government, as it currently is, every bed that becomes available in Mount Alvernia is being refilled by a person in the community; and it is the aim of Government to continue with that policy, but not just in Mount Alvernia – in Mount Alvernia, in the John Mackintosh Wing and in I would say Bella Vista but it is not Bella Vista it is the residential home up in Hillside.

1495 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And if I may because, I think, in terms of the alarm that may have been caused as a result of the provision of that figure, which is 335 and she has, I think, assuaged our concerns slightly in relation to that alarm. She bunches up, she splits it into three and the final category, which is 230 in number, she describes as non-urgent.

1500 In that, and I am relying on responses that we have had from the Minister for Economic Development in the past in the previous Parliament that there are people who future-plan, so there are 60-year-olds who have no issues, if I can put it in those terms, who put their names down for the future.

Is that a correct analysis of what we are dealing with here in the categorisation of those individuals who are classified as non-urgent?

1505 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not have a breakdown of exactly what the categories are. But, absolutely, there are people in those 230 that are on that list for a whole raft of different reasons, including future-proofing, but I cannot give you a specific breakdown of how many would be on that list or for what reason.

1510 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Just to press her on that I presume she cannot provide us with that information here and now but if we were to file a question she would, I imagine, it is on the basis of not having the information available with her today, as opposed to impossible to provide in the future?

1515 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** So, Madam Speaker, I am not certain that when someone goes to put their names on a list for Mount Alvernia, we ask for the reasons that they are on the list. It might be a case that we can discern what the reason is and we can determine if it is future-proofing, or we might not. So I am not certain that I *can* provide that information for that reason, but if that information is available I will certainly share it.

1520 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q307/2024
Head of Older People's Services –
New role or replacement of existing position

Clerk: Question 307/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

1525 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government clarify whether the position of 'Head of Older People's Services' is a newly created role, or if it has replaced an existing position? If it has replaced an existing position could the Government specify which role it has replaced?

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

1530 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, just to pick up on a point that the hon. Member raised before, I have just got confirmation that there is no floor being refurbished in Mount Alvernia at the moment.

In answer to Question 307, Madam Speaker, the position of Head of Older People's Services was created in August 2023 following the retirement of the person who held the substantive post of Care Manager with Nursing Responsibility. The post was also known as the Director of Elderly Residential Services.

1540 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I am grateful for that answer. Could the hon. Member confirm whether there is currently someone covering this post on a permanent basis at the moment?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I can confirm that there is someone covering this person on a permanent basis.

1545 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And can I ask, just for clarification, so when the hon. Member says this post was created in August 2023 when the Care Manager at Nursing services, I think she said –

A Member: Care Manager with Responsibility –

1550 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** – or Care Manager, stood down. Is this in effect a change of title or is it a change of role?

So, they have lost one post which had a different role or maybe a partly overlapping role and they have created a different role? Or they have just changed the title but it is exactly the same role that was being conducted by the person who stood down in August 2023?

1555 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the change arrangement was organised in a period where the GHA was independent, so I am giving my impression of what has happened and I have received email confirmation. So, the post is a renaming of the post of Care Manager with Nursing Responsibilities and it carries out the same duties as the individual who was a Care Manager with Nursing Responsibilities/Director of ERS who had it previously. So it is a renaming of the same position.

1560 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And the person filling the post is a qualified nurse. Is that the core qualification of the role?

1565 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I believe the individual is a matron at the moment that is fulfilling the role, which is a very similar qualification the previous individual held.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q308/2024

Seeing GHA physiotherapist – Length of current waiting list

1570 **Clerk:** Question 308/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how long is the current waiting time to see a physiotherapist within the GHA?

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

1575 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, physiotherapy offers a wide range of services, each with separate waiting lists. For physiotherapists within St Bernadette's Hospital the information is as follows: for acute referrals it is three working days, for sub-acute referrals it is three weeks, and routine referrals it is four and a half months.

1580

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for those replies.

I am slightly concerned about some of those replies, simply because I have heard reports of very long waiting lists where individuals have been waiting for more than three years in order to be referred, and not to be referred but to actually see a physiotherapist.

1585

What would the Hon. Minister propose to do in respect of such individuals?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the information that I have available is that the waiting list for sub-acute or routine referrals is at four-and-a-half months. I am not sure a waiting list of three years is accurate; however, I am happy to review those cases if they do exist. *(Interjection)*

1590

We have a have a complaints procedure in the Ministry, and all of these cases tend to come to us. I can go through the compliments of physios, I can go through the hours of the compliments of physios, it would surprise me if there is a case that has been referred and it is on a waiting list for three years.

1595

Madam Speaker: Now the Supplementaries, next question.

Q309/2024

Prosthetic limbs and maintenance – Cost to GHA over years

Clerk: Question 309/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1600

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what has been the cost to the GHA of providing prosthetic limbs and maintenance of those prosthetics to service users in the following years, broken down by month 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 to date.

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

1605

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

1610

1615

Answer to Question 309

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Jan	£2,948.00		£15,703.43		£222.53	£2,387.96
Feb					£950.25	£8,240.99
Mar		£26,537.47	£5,842.97	£9668.95	£3,518.44	
Apr	£720.00				£55.00	
May	£900.00					
June					£190.16	
July	£3,692.00		£758.46		£9,412.45	
Aug		£12,136.95				
Sept	£237.00	£9,832.18			£8,323.67	
Oct	£1,443.00	£1,112.30	£15,802.61	£13543.29	£2,520.22	
Nov			£1,017.47		£856.37	
Dec	£950.58			£9,862.03		

1620 **Madam Speaker:** All right, we will move to the next question and then come back to that one.

Q310-11/2024
Obesity within Gibraltar –
Gathering relevant data to monitor indications

Clerk: Question 310/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, is the GHA gathering relevant data to assess and monitor annual baseline indications of obesity within Gibraltar?

1625

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 311.

1630

Clerk: Question 311. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what are the plans within the GHA to tackle obesity within Gibraltar?

1635

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

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the GHA together, importantly, with Public Health collect relevant data in relation to obesity across a number of different areas, which mainly include health and lifestyle service, child measurement programmes and measurements captured with the primary care electronic patient record.

1640

Information will be published shortly as part of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and utilised to monitor progress against the Six-Steps Whole Systems Plan approach to obesity. The six steps are: the setup, the building of the local picture, mapping of the local system, action, managing the system network, and reflect and refresh of the system.

1645

Madam Speaker: Any Supplementaries?

1650 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, would the Hon. Minister ... is it her view that Gibraltar has an obesity problem?

1655 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I think, along the lines of most Western nations we are facing an increase in children's weights. I think that the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment looks into this and provides answers as to where we are in the spectrum and what we need to do in relation to this.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Does the Hon. Minister feel that the programme that has been rolled out to tackle obesity in Gibraltar is being successful?

1660 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we are in the process of rolling it out. So the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is a website that will have all the information available on it, which will be rolled out shortly. So if we did not think that this was going to work, and in particular if the Director of Public Health did not think this was going to work we would not be rolling it out.

1665 So absolutely, yes, we do think this needs to be monitored and we are looking into it and there is a specific scheme in place in order to address these issues, not just along the lines of obesity but numerous others as well, and we believe the programme that will be put in place will address the problem.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q312-13/2024

Health care professionals/nutritional values of food – Patients in St Bernard's; conferring with caterers

1670 **Clerk:** Question 312/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, is there any input from health care professionals in respect of the nutritional value of the food provided to patients admitted to St Bernard's Hospital and do they confer with caterers as to menus?

1675 **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 313.

1680 **Clerk:** Question 313/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1685 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what was the expenditure to the GHA of the food provided to patients admitted to St Bernard's Hospital in the following years, broken down by month: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to date.

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

1690 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in relation to Question 312, health care professionals do indeed provide input in respect of the nutritional value of food served to patients. The Hospital dieticians ensure patients dietary requirements are met and are constantly in liaison with and advising the catering department accordingly.

In respect of Question 313, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Question 313

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Jan	£79,264.75	£76,217.33	£71,892.27	£66,394.08	£96,779.41	£125,938.94
Feb	£21,629.11	£46,782.54	£27,985.89	£41,720.82	£33,716.13	£69,995.13
Mar	£5,447.75	£44,328.70	£43,936.51	£69,962.50	£79,645.17	
Apr	£86,337.57	£46,374.55	£54,622.63	£6,600.28	£52,629.56	
May	£66,121.32	£18,705.33	£17,025.15	£38,721.87	£49,692.36	
June	£9,379.74	£47,211.08	£25,597.56	£72,398.41	£59,646.99	
July	£77,610.04	£31,156.00	£19,681.21	£38,824.52	£44,992.68	
Aug	£1,154.00	£33,555.63	£51,784.21	£78,544.17	£63,017.09	
Sept	£51,581.33	£56,238.73	£66,820.48	£52,478.06	£30,535.65	
Oct	£83,484.42	£43,595.46	£71,436.22	£62,293.98	£80,034.50	
Nov	£38,164.35	£51,784.46	£61,342.09	£41,027.81	£54,489.54	
Dec	£57,740.02	£37,135.64	£64,818.87	£31,678.99	£36,705.22	

1695 **Madam Speaker:** All right, we will move on to the next question, although that is two schedules we need to come back to.

Q314/2024

**Dedicated telephone appointment lines –
Primary Care Centre free; Children’s Health Centre to pay**

Clerk: Question 314/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1700 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, for what reasons is there a charge when calling the dedicated telephone line for appointments at the Children’s Health Centre, when the dedicated telephone line to make an appointment at the Primary Care Centre is free of charge?

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

1705 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the reason for the charge is twofold.

Firstly, the free trial service for the dedicated children’s telephone line as instructed by the Government was never implemented by Gibtelecom.

1710 Secondly, I can assure the House that starting from this week the children’s appointment line will be toll-free when calling from Gibtelecom number.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q315-16/2024

**Post-partum aftercare for new mothers –
Checks and follow-up care provided**

Clerk: Question 315/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1715 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, what post-partum aftercare does the GHA currently provide to new mothers and does that care include internal checks, checks to determine whether there has been a prolapse, pelvic floor checks, checks for diastasis recti and a smear?

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

1720 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Question 316.

Clerk: Question 316/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1725 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, in the event that a post-partum check by the GHA of a new mother reveals issues, is follow up care being provided?

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

1730 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, yes. In the event that the post-partum check by the GHA of a new mother reveals issues, the patient will be followed up according to best clinical practice and NICE guidelines.

1735 Regarding specific post-partum aftercare, midwives provide *post-natal* care for the first six weeks post-partum and any concerns will be addressed during this time.

Mothers are also scheduled for their postnatal review at eight weeks *post-partum*. This review, which is performed by a GP or general practitioner, involves a check for diastasis recti, a check for prolapse, discussion regarding pelvic-floor exercises, a mental health assessment and a discussion regarding contraception.

1740 Their smear history is also reviewed to ensure that this is up to date. If this is not the case, they are then booked in for a smear after 12 weeks following current guidelines for post-partum smears.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the answer.

1745 Again, we have received recent complaints that suggests that women are not receiving comprehensive post-partum care and that is resulting, unfortunately, in them having to go privately, particularly in respect of pelvic-floor checks.

What would the Hon. Minister suggest could be done in order to stop this from occurring?

1750 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, once again, there is a complaints office that is based in the Ministry at the moment. We have not heard any complaints of post-partum checks. In fact, the maternity ward, the maternity care received in the ward and the maternity post-partum care is often one that is praised rather than criticised.

1755 So if there are any such complaints, I am happy to receive them at our office and we can review them.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful and I have nothing but praise having gone through the maternity ward myself, twice. Nothing but praise for them.

1760 But the point, I think, being made is once they are discharged from the maternity ward and there do continue to be issues and one does know when one has a new born that at times is not the right time to make the these complaints.

So I would urge the Minister to look further into this area because there have been a fair amount of complaints made. I would be grateful.

1765 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, first of all, delighted to take that up; but I am unclear as to who the complaints have been made because they are certainly not being made to my office.

So, delighted to take that up if there are any issues, but none have been received at my office about any post-partum care, or to clarify or at Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service (PALS), the GHA complaints office.

1770

Hon. J Ladislaus: Just as a response, but also as a question. I take that point, nevertheless I emphasise that at the stage which some of these mothers are at, they are new mothers, they have just had babies, they might not be in the frame of mind to go and make a complaint, an official complaint. Nevertheless, the complaints are being received by us as Members of the Opposition; and again I would ask that the Hon. Minister look further into this.

1775

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I take that point and I know how difficult the post-partum period can be. It is very bizarre, however, that somebody does not feel it necessary to go to PALS or to come to the Ministry with a complaint and yet has the energy and focus of mind to go to the Opposition with a complaint. *(Interjection)*

1780

As I have said, if there are any such complaints, we are more than happy to look into the services being provided. But to date, my office or PALS have not received any complaints about maternity or post-partum care, and in fact this is one of the areas that is often praised within the GHA. So very happy to listen to complaints, but we have not received any.

1785

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q317-23/2024

Specialist incubators for transport of babies – Fitted out in GHA ambulances; costs

Clerk: Question 317/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can all vehicles within the current fleet of GHA ambulances fit specialist incubators for the transport of babies?

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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 Questions 318 to 323.

1795

Clerk: Question 318/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are the St John's Ambulance, High Dependency Unit ambulances considered appropriate and safe by medical staff and paramedics to carry out the task of emergency Level 3 transfers?

1800

Clerk: Question 319/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, has the St John's Ambulance High Dependency Unit ambulance been repaired? And if so, what was the cost of repairs and did the GHA settle the invoices for those repairs?

1805

Clerk: Question 320/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1810

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, for how much longer will the GHA need to rely on external providers to provide High Dependency Unit ambulances for emergency level-three transfers?

Clerk: Question 321/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1815

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how many emergency Level 3 transfers to Spain have there been in the months of January 2024 and February 2024 and were those transfers all affected by the *Helicopteros Sanitarios* High Dependency Unit ambulance?

1820

Clerk: Question 322/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, has the GHA received invoices from *Helicopteros Sanitarios* for the month of January 2024, in respect of services rendered regarding emergency Level 3 transfers to Spain?

1825

Clerk: Question 323/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what was the cost of contracting the High Dependency Unit ambulance from *Helicopteros Sanitarios* for the month of January 2024 and has that agreement now come to an end? If not, what was the cost of contracting the High Dependency Unit ambulance for the month of February 2024?

1830

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

1835

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 317, at present none of the current GHA ambulances can accommodate an incubator. The process that is used to transport incubated babies is to call for a specialist Spanish ambulance. The new GHA ambulances, which are awaiting delivery, *will* allow such transfers.

In answer to Question 318, Spanish Law mandates as from December 2023 that ambulances of over 10 years cannot operate in such a capacity. Consequently, St John's Ambulances HDUs are no longer considered for Level 3 transfers.

1840

In answer to Question 319 the cost of the repairs to the St John's HDU ambulance is £1,171.25. This has been settled by the GHA. As at 21st February 2024 the GHA no longer relies on external providers for the provision of HDU ambulances for emergency Level 3 transfers.

1845

In answer to Question 321 one Level 3 transfer was carried out in January and two in February. The three transfers were affected by *Helicopteros Sanitarios* HDU ambulances.

In answer to Question 322, yes.

And in answer to Question 323, the cost of contracting the High Dependency Unit ambulances from *Helicopteros Sanitarios* is as follows: from 12th January 2024 to 12th February 2024 cost is €43,531.36; 13th February to 20th February the cost is €11,608.40.

1850

The contract with *Helicopteros Sanitarios* ended at 8 o'clock in the morning on 21st February 2024 after providing five weeks of cover.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for those answers. I will just try to unpack them one by one.

1855

As regards 317, which is whether the vehicles can fit the specialist incubators, what is happening in the interim? My apologies, she did answer that question. *(Interjection)*

In respect of the St John's Ambulance High Dependency Unit ambulances, I understand that the contract with *Helicopteros Sanitarios* has now ended, so what is in place in the interim until the new ambulance arrives, therefore?

1860

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as a consequence of our legislation implemented in respect of the HDU-level transfers, those transfers are now effected by our frontline ambulances,

which have been temporarily converted for this purpose. We also have an agreement with *Helicopteros Sanitarios* for a standby Level 3 vehicle should this be necessary.

1865

Hon. J Ladislaus: On the subject of the new ambulance, has that now arrived in Gibraltar and has it been converted to spec?

1870

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: To my knowledge that has not arrived in Gibraltar, but it should be arriving by the end of the month.

1875

Hon. J Ladislaus: We have heard that the GHA settled the costs of the repairs to the St John's Ambulance. For what reason did the GHA settle the costs when St John's Ambulance is, to my knowledge, a private entity?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the arrangement to my understanding, and I need to confirm this, is that if we use the ambulances we pay for the repairs. As we used the ambulances we therefore paid for the repairs.

1880

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that, but if I can just go back and have the Minister potentially give me some further information as to that point. She says the agreement is that if the GHA uses the ambulances, then they pay for repairs. Is there a specified number of hours that the GHA must use the ambulances for? Or, how does that clause work within that agreement?

1885

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as I have told the hon. Member previously, for specifics like this I need to prepare specifically. So if you ask me the question in advance, I am more than happy to prepare that information and provide it and share it across the House, that is not a problem. But I do not have the information available with me.

1890

Hon. J Ladislaus: In respect of the new ambulance, could I just confirm that that is actually a High Dependency Unit ambulance?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as I believe I have confirmed before, it is a High Dependency Unit. I am relying here purely on memory, but I believe I have confirmed before that it is a High Dependency Unit ambulance.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Could I just ask: how many operational ambulances does the GHA currently have?

1900

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, again with respect, if you want specifics on the operations, I believe this question has been asked before. But if you want specifics on the fleet etc., please ask me the question specifically and I will provide that information.

1905

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Minister perhaps confirm whether the ambulances that remain operational are considered to be in good condition and good enough condition to be on the roads and to be operating?

1910

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, when we required additional ambulances, we rented the additional ambulances and there was a contract with *Helicopteros Sanitarios* to make sure that the need of every Gibraltarian was met if they required an ambulance. I think that answers the question.

If we thought that there were more ambulances required, we would enter into a similar contract as we have done previously. I am informed that the need is adequately met.

1915 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Does the Hon. Minister agree, perhaps, that she just said that when the GHA requires ambulances we rent them. Can the Hon. Minister agree that if new ambulances had been ordered previously, when they should have been, this would not now be a problem and we would not be incurring the costs of having to rent these new ambulances?

1920 **Madam Speaker:** Well, I am not sure it is an entirely hypothetical question, but if the Minister wants to raise the issue that it is hypothetical, then I will listen to you.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is an entirely hypothetical question and when we do, as I have said in the past, an ambulance is being ordered, the ambulance will arrive soon. And if we felt that there was a need for more ambulances we would have acquired more ambulances.

1925 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** With respect, I do not think there is anything hypothetical about asking the question. I believe it is logical, but anyway if the ambulances had been ordered sooner we would not now be incurring the costs of having to rent ambulances because we do not have a high-dependency unit available to us. (*Interjection*)

1930 **Madam Speaker:** No question? Is there a question on the end of that? What is the question?

Hon. J Ladislaus: Is that correct or is that not a correct assumption to make?

1935 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, with the very greatest of respect to all hon. Members, if any question is prefaced with an 'if', it is likely to lead to a hypothesis. Now, if the ambulance had been ordered sooner maybe they would not have arrived on time and we would have had to rent anyway. If the ambulances had been ordered sooner, maybe they would have broken down sooner and we might have had to rent.

1940 'If' leads us only to one conclusion that something *might* have happened and therefore, Madam Speaker, if the hon. Lady simply wants to say if they had been ordered sooner, they would have arrived sooner. Even that, she might say, is logical, but is not necessarily the case. The Parliament is here to deal with facts.

1945 If they have been ordered on a particular date, we will know when they arrive and if we can be asked on what day were they ordered, on what day will they arrive, we will give the facts, which is what we are here to do. We have to be very careful when we give information in Parliament because it has to be correct. It *has* to be correct.

1950 If we give information which is not correct, hon. Members will at the next session say it is disgraceful, 'You gave information which is not correct. You have to correct the record.' So we cannot, in all conscience, answer the hon. Lady's question knowing that the information we will give is correct, whether she wants to assume it is logical or not.

1955 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for that answer, but I will put the question to the hon. Lady at the next parliamentary session.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q324-25/2024
Consecutive hours for nurses –
Numbers per shift

Clerk: Question 324/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1960 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, how many consecutive hours is a nurse employed within the GHA currently allowed to work?

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

1965 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 325.

Clerk: Question 325/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1970 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, how many hours per shift are nurses employed within the GHA currently working and what is their shift pattern in terms of days on shift and rest days?

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

1975 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the number of hours per shift that nurses within the GHA can work vary between department and vary between services. The majority of nurses undertake an eight-hour or 12-hour shift.

1980 The shift pattern can vary from five-day working pattern with two-days' rest, or a four-day working pattern with three-days' rest. The maximum allowed schedule shift for a nurse is 12.5 hours. However, if the need arises, they can be allowed to work additional hours as a result of an emergency situation or to ensure safe care delivery to patients.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful again for the answer; and again we have had reports that there have been nurses known to work a period of two weeks solidly without taking a day off.

1985 Could the Hon. Minister comment as to what is being done to address that issue?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, this could be for a variety of different reasons and I would suggest that if there are those sorts of issues they are raised with HR. This could be because they have agreed with colleagues to cover shifts. This could be for *numerous* different reasons.

1990 I cannot stand here and give the hon. Member opposite a suitable reason or what has happened, but I would suggest that anyone in that circumstance raises that issue with HR, raises that issue with my Ministry, or raises that issue with a person that might be able to look into it, if indeed there is something incorrect with the manner in which they are doing their shifts.
1995 (*Interjection*)

Madam Speaker: Yes.

2000 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Can I ask?

Madam Speaker: Yes, put the question.

2005 **Hon. E J Reyes:** She said previously in the answer that shifts for consecutive working hours for nurses could range between eight and 12 hours. During those periods that the nurse is on shift is there a standard, or at least ideal break somewhere in between because, no matter what situation you work in – but especially if you are looking after patients, it is your job – is there a minimum break that should be given somewhere between or is a nurse expected to be 12 hours on his or her feet continuously?

2010 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be able to say that the shifts are exactly the same as when the hon. Gentleman was in Government. The shift patterns have not

changed, they are identical; and any flexibility is to ensure patient safety and maximum patient care. So, it is exactly the same system that has always been the case with the nurses' shifts in the Hospital.

2015

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

I appreciate in the answer you are saying, it is as when I used to sit on that side. But I have not had a reply to my answer. If a nurse goes in, let's say at 8 o'clock in the morning and his or her shift is until 8 o'clock in the evening is there at least a guideline towards management, or the Sister in charge of the ward, to give that particular employee a break in a normal situation, save emergencies in a hospital, which you never know what is going to happen from one minute to the next.

2020

Is there a standard, say, half-an-hour break or something towards lunchtime or something? That is what I am trying to get at, what the situation is today as at 14th March 2024, in the year of our Lord.

2025

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I think that the hon. Member is asking me about consecutive shifts and you were asking me about lunch breaks in between. The guidelines followed are the guidelines, again, that have always been in place and the guidelines for legal work-force policy. There is a 12.5 hour shift because the 12 hours are the hours worked on the ward and the half hour is the handover. This has always been the case for time immemorial.

2030

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q326-29/2024

GHA's mental health facilities – Nurses' training revised and up to date

Clerk: Question 326/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2035

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are all nurses employed within the GHA's mental health facilities provided with training prior to taking up their role, and is that training revised and kept up to date?

2040

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 327, 328 and 329.

2045

Clerk: Question 327. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Government provide statistics as to the number of nurses employed within the GHA's mental health facilities who have taken sick leave between 2019 to date, broken down by month?

2050

Clerk: Question 328. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, how many nurses and nursing assistants are currently employed at Ocean Views, broken down by nurses employed directly by the GHA and those employed via agencies?

2055

Clerk: Question 329. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

2060 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the current contingent of nurses and nursing assistants at Ocean View sufficient to meet demand?

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

2065 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, in answer to Question 326, all nurses employed within the GHA's mental health facilities are given an induction orientation to the mental health facilities and the services they provide. This includes prevention and management of violence and aggression (PMBA), infection control, manual handling, basic life support and an overall induction into the current mental health policies.

2070 Relevant training is reviewed as and when necessary, dependent on the criteria laid down by the respective accrediting body; and furthermore all issues relating to training or implementation of any type of training specific to mental health is discussed and agreed by senior management and taken to executive level for ratification and final approval.

In answer to Question 327, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Answer to Question 327

Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
2019	13	14	10	10	8	12	8	10	18	19	18	14
2020	20	20	21	22	22	15	-	19	15	13	14	16
2021	16	19	18	14	9	15	23	14	12	17	22	-
2022	19	16	18	14	19	-	12	16	14	8	16	10
2023	13	12	14	10	20	17	16	18	15	13	19	12
2024	15	10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

2075 I will just carry on. In answer to 328, currently the GHA directly employs 45 nurses and 19 nursing assistants at Ocean Views. In addition, two nurses are employed by UK agencies and nine nursing assistants are employed by local agencies.

2080 In answer to Question 329 the current complement is sufficient to meet demand and there have been no recorded instances where demand has been greater than the available complement of the nursing staff.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard that nurses do get training, obviously, as and when they arrive at the GHA's mental health facilities.

2085 Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether all these nurses are bilingual and proficient in both English and Spanish?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I cannot confirm or deny that. I do not have the information available.

2090 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for that answer and I will ask the question, if needs be, separately; but just by way of explanation as to that question, perhaps that could assist in the information gathering.

2095 There have been reports of nurses speaking only Spanish so that some patients who speak only English – and we are, after all, British – are left in difficulties particularly in this area of medicine where it is crucial that the patient can actually communicate with the carer. So I would ask for the Minister to look into that as it is rather important.

2100 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful for that question but given that there are 45 nurses and 19 nursing assistants employed directly by the GHA, it would surprise me that in that complement of 45 nurses and 19 nursing assistants, they are unable to speak English and Spanish, particularly because of a residency requirement that is required in order to employ someone directly by the GHA.

2105 So I would imagine that most of those people employed by the GHA are able to speak English and Spanish. The two nurses that are employed via UK agencies, I would also be very surprised if they are unable to speak English. And again, Madam Speaker, this is a subject that we have not heard any complaints with and I would suggest that most of these people that are complaining would come to either my office, PALS, the Mental Health Support Team, the Mental Health Directors and inform them of these issues and let them know that these are concerns.

2110 **Madam Speaker:** You have Supplementaries?

2115 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I just ask the Minister in relation to 328, the number of nurses employed, she said 45 direct and I think a further nine through agencies. So of those how many are RMNs?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, once again, I would ask the Opposition and I would ask the hon. Member to provide me with notice in advance of the questions and I can provide happily that information across the floor.

2120 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Yes, it is just that the question asks about the number of nurses, so I was asking that Supplementary because I would imagine that sometimes her officials would have broken down the nurses in relation to whether they were RMNs or not.

So I was asking in case she had the supplementary information in front of her. I am not sure that notice is necessarily required. But would she be able to write to me on that?

2125 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, if the hon. Member writes to me asking me the question directly I am more than happy to reply with the information requested.

Madam Speaker: Now the Supplementaries.

2130 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, we can play that game but I have asked the question, would she be able to write to me. Is the answer no, because I have to write to her?

2135 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, as a matter of practice on this side of the House, we are very concerned that if we say that we are going to write to hon. Members and we fail to do so because we have a very heavy workload, they will then say that we have failed to deliver on an undertaking.

2140 So the hon. Gentleman will know that all we say to him when he asks me and other Members also say the same thing, absolutely no problem in putting this down in writing in a letter instead of getting to the next meeting of the House, but please just write to me asking me that and I will reply because the letter prompts the reply rather than going away from here, potentially forgetting, and then in effect failing the parliamentary equivalent of an undertaking to respond to the hon. Members.

2145 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The hon. Member knows, at least certainly, my practice has never really been that way. When I have asked Ministers before would they write to me, invariably they have and if they have not and they have forgotten, well, I have tabled a question. But I will certainly write to the hon. Lady on this issue, although I do not think that practice necessarily should always be the case. If Ministers agree and then they forget, I understand that and I will file a question.

2150 **Madam Speaker:** Any other Supplementaries? Next question.

Q330/2024
Modulab stock controls –
Implementation in Pathology Department

Clerk: Question 330/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, when was the Modulab system of stock controls implemented within the Pathology Department?

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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 Modulab Stock Module was initially implemented within the Pathology Department's Haematology section in 2017. Once in full use with the Haematology section it was then cascaded to other sections within the Department by 2021.

2160

Madam Speaker: Next question.

2165

Q331/2024
Medical Board report tabled –
Reasons behind delay

Clerk: Question 331/2024. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, when will the latest Medical Board report be tabled and what are the reasons behind the delay in tabling this document?

2170

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there is no such thing as a Medical Board report.

2175

Madam Speaker: Any Supplementaries?

Hon. J Ladislaus: No, Madam Speaker, I will be re-tabling that one on the basis that the spelling is incorrect.

2180

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q332/2024
Companies/Individuals feed back into grid –
Details

Clerk: Question 332/2024. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Can the Hon. Minister please confirm how many companies and individuals currently feed back into the grid and can the Hon. Minister please provide details of these?

2185

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, today there are four companies that have completed the installations and two private residences that feed back to the grid.

2190

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, would the hon. Member be kind enough to elucidate, as the question asks, as to details of these? Would she know the names of the companies, please?

2195

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, there are four companies. They are: Park Solar One that provides services to new harbours, Europa Business Centre, Mid-Harbours Estate.

There is the Energy Vision Group that provides services to the Europa Sports Stadium, Bassadone World, Special Olympics, University residential block and the Lathbury Stadium.

2200

Renewergy which provides services to St Joseph's School, the Cruise Liner Terminal and Gibraltar University. And Green Resources which provides services to the GASA swimming pool and St Bernard's Hospital.

The private residences are 50 Europa Views and 8/1, 8/2 and 8/3 Armstrong Steps.

2205

Hon. C Sacarello: Much obliged, Madam Speaker, for the hon. Member's response there. Would her Government know when this availability or ability to feed back into the grid will be rolled out to the rest of the general public, including estates, private and Government?

2210

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Once again, I would ask for that specific question to be tabled so I can get a specific response from the Gibraltar Electricity Authority.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q333/2024
Time-of-use tariffs –
Energy efficiency and benefits

Clerk: Question 333/2024. The Hon. C Sacarello.

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Hon. C Sacarello: Has the Government and the GEA considered implementing a time-of-use tariff, offering off-peak energy discount incentives for consumers, which would bring energy efficiencies to the grid while passing on those benefits to its clients, the consumers?

2220

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GEA continues to look at potential ways of incentivising the efficient use of energy by all its consumers. However, implementing a time-of-use tariff, offering off-peak energy discount incentives to consumers like, for example, implemented in the UK, would not work for Gibraltar as major power grids have different commercial and technical constraints which are not present in Gibraltar due to our size and lack of interconnectivity to other grids.

2225

2230 In the UK, power demand is met on a daily basis by dispatching the required generating capacity from different power stations. These power stations and installations use different technologies to generate power, for example, nuclear, gas, oil, coal, renewables; and in the case of the UK an interconnector from France.

2235 Power demand during any 24-hour period varies depending on the time of day, with the peak usually occurring in the early evening and the minimum in the early hours of the morning. Due to the relatively poor flexibility of some of the base-loading plant in the UK – for example, nuclear – the Economy 7 tariff, which is this time-of-use tariff, was introduced in an attempt to incentivise consumers to increase the country's minimum consumption to a value above a threshold where inflexible power plants which required a long-lead time to restart, would need to be stopped. This practice is not being recommended when operating, for example, nuclear power plants.

2240 In Gibraltar, due to the nature of the size of our grid, we only operate flexible, and that means quick to start and stop plant technology, that is we use engines and not turbines powered by high-pressure steam boilers, and therefore there are no technology restrictions on plants being dispatched to meet maximum; or in this particular case more relevantly, minimum power demands.

2245 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, thank you very much for that information by the way, which was very detailed.

Would the hon. Member be willing to share any reports or studies carried out for our knowledge to avoid questions where the information is already available, obviously in writing?

Thank you.

2250 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not think there are any reports, as such, this information has been provided to me by the GEA. I am happy to go back and ask for the information and if the hon. Member writes to me, again I am happy to share that information with him.

2255 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q334/2024

Emergency water pipeline to Spain – Fully installed

Clerk: Question 334/2024. The Hon. C Sacarello.

2260 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Is the option of an emergency supply water pipe, sorry, water pipeline to Spain, which former Minister Isola referred to following the 2022 fire at Power's Drive Tunnel, now fully installed, such that it would be possible to flick the switch, as it were, if another emergency were to occur?

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

2265 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, AquaGib informs us that the 2.7 km pipeline from the Waterworks reservoirs to the border are approximately 80% complete. The remaining 20% relates to the section across the Sundial roundabout from the Cross of Sacrifice, along Winston Churchill Avenue and up to Hesses Bastion.

2270 The cost to the Taxpayer, both monetarily and in disruptive terms, means that the timing of this last section is currently under review. However, AquaGib is already in a position where the remaining section could be laid, under emergency conditions, before Gibraltar suffered any

widespread outage of the portable water supply. It should be noted that this contingency option would never be immediately available, because Spain does not have a water supply point at the border and works to connect would be required at the Spanish side of the border.

2275

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries? No, all right, we will come back to Question 309. Does the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus have any Supplementaries? Any other Member?

2280

Hon. J Ladislaus: Simply, it is just a question as to, I think I know the answer, but just to clarify. Why do the amounts range so greatly? I think I do know, but just to qualify.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the amounts are demand driven, so whatever the individual users need we would provide at that point in time.

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Madam Speaker: Any other questions?

Hon. J Ladislaus: Yes, it is pretty much the same question in respect of the second table as to Question 313. I do not know if we have moved yet.

2290

Madam Speaker: So we have finished with 309? All of you? Yes, all right, 313 then.

Hon. J Ladislaus: In respect to 313, we can see that the values also range very wildly. January 2019 £79,000, and then we come down to June £9,000; August £1,154. Can the Hon. Minister comment as to why these figures vary so significantly?

2295

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, once again the amounts are led by the demand in the Hospital. So depending on the number of patients in hospital, depending the amounts of spend on the food.

2300

Madam Speaker: Any other Supplementaries? All right, move on, then.

Questions for Written Answer

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the Answers to Written Questions numbered W14/2024 to W28/2024.

2305

Madam Speaker, I also have the honour now to move that the House should now adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m. in the afternoon.

2310

Madam Speaker: And I propose the question, which is that this House should adjourn to tomorrow at 3 p.m. in the afternoon. I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn until 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 6.05 p.m.