



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3 p.m. – 5.25 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 26th September 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3 p.m.

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

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

Questions for Oral Answer

CHIEF MINISTER

Q778-83/2024

Government staff turnover –

**Monthly figures for Gibraltar Fire Service, Borders and Coastguard Agency,
Royal Gibraltar Police, HM Prison, Gibraltar Health Authority and HM Customs**

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 26th September 2024.

Questions to the Chief Minister. Question 778. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

5 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical staff and firefighters working for the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 779 to 783.

15

Clerk: Question 779. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

20 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical staff and Borders and Coastguard officers working for the Borders and Coastguard Agency, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

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Clerk: 780. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical staff and police officers working for the Royal Gibraltar Police, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

Clerk: Question 781. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical staff and prison officers working for His Majesty's Prison, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

Clerk: Question 782. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical and medical staff working for the GHA, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

Clerk: Question 783. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the Hon. Chief Minister provide statistics as to the average monthly employee turnover of clerical staff and customs officers working for the Customs, separating the figures between those employed on permanent contracts and those engaged through other arrangements, for the following years: 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 to date?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the information requested is too voluminous to provide in the time available.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for that indication. Can the Hon. Chief Minister provide an indication as to how long it would take to compile such information?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, today I confess I will be rising with trepidation because whenever I see a judge wearing black I wonder whether they are here to sentence to death. Therefore, I will do my best to please the House and tell the hon. Lady that if you were to allow the questions to be put again next month, I am informed that we will have been able to compile the information by then. If the hon. Member thinks that this is information which it is worth having – which, given the question, is not one which I consider is delving for information which is not without its use, and I think it is important to have – we would then update it every month on the government website.

Madam Speaker: In that case, I will allow the hon. Member to put the question again next session.

Next question.

Q784/2024
Import Duty –
Amounts collected in June, July and August 2024

Clerk: Question 784. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, can the Government advise the amounts of Import Duty collected in the following months: June 2024, July 2024 and August 2024?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Yes, ma'am. The Import Duty collected for June, July and August 2024 is as follows: June 2024, £11,507,756.65; July 2024, £5,150,596.21; and August 2024, £9,906,265.70.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q785/2024

Borders and Coastguard Agency – Union demands for additional resources

Clerk: Question 785. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Government in discussions with the unions in respect of demands for additional resources for the Borders and Coastguard Agency, given their recent statement on the under-resourcing in that area?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

95

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar, the Office of the Chief Secretary and the Industrial Relations team continue to be in discussion with the unions concerning the Borders and Coastguard Agency. In these fora, many matters are raised, discussed and addressed, inclusive of resourcing. It is not the Government's position that there is a resourcing issue at the Borders and Coastguard Agency, although it is, of course, open to representations from the union and its members.

100

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: May I just ask the Chief Minister ...? I take it that, as he says, they are in continued discussions. I asked a different question in this House in relation to Borders and Coastguard industrial action some months ago, and there were detailed exchanges across the floor of the House in relation to press releases issued at the time, where the unions condescended, and so did the Government, into quite a level of detail as to the issues that were being discussed. Given the press release issued much more recently by Unite, alluding to what they view as under-resourcing issues, is there a new list of issues and concerns that have been put to the Government, or are we talking about an extension of discussions on the same issues and the union issuing a press release about the same matter?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I understand these are continuing discussions about the same issues. Sometimes, issuing press releases is considered by some parties to a negotiation, whether it is a national negotiation or an international negotiation, as a way of putting pressure on the other side, which of course, if we were the other side, we would resist.

115

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So that I understand – I think I have understood the hon. Member's answer, that it is not a fresh set of issues – there is no major new matter that has emerged since May; these are a continuation?

120 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Yes, Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's understanding of my answer is based on my understanding of the issue being exactly as he set out.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q786/2024

**Joshua Hassan House –
Use as government offices**

Clerk: Question 786. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

125

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, does the Government intend to continue to use Joshua Hassan House for government offices?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, yes, Joshua Hassan House continues to be used to house government offices. As I have repeatedly told Members opposite, the relocation of some government departments is still ongoing. The Government will make an announcement regarding its future plans in due course.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Before I put the question, I am so grateful for the lectern that has been produced by the staff of the House; it makes it so much easier to read stuff with my compromised eyesight.

140

I understand what he says, but the reason for my question is that the information that was being received by Members on this side of the House was that certain Departments that had had longstanding occupation of Joshua Hassan House were moving out or had left and that the premises were now almost empty. That is why I enquire as to that. Does the Chief Minister have a sense of when the Government will be ready to make an announcement as to its future public use?

145

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do have a sense of when we might be able to make that determination, but of course I am not here to provide the hon. Gentleman with a sense of anything; I am here to provide information. Having a sense is not having a certainty, and I must not mislead the House, so when we are ready to make that statement I shall make the statement in the appropriate forum.

150

Finally, Madam Speaker, if I can just say that I, too, benefit greatly from having a lectern these days, which brings matters closer to my eyes, and I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman has also received one from the ardent work of the staff of the House. Now they know where public finance money goes. They say they do not know what we spend our money on. There we go.

155

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am very grateful for that disbursement of public moneys so that I can put the questions that those who have put us in these seats have asked us to put.

May I just ask one more question on this issue? Is Joshua Hassan House going to be used for government departments, or is it for other entities not formally government departments?

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am delighted that they were put there to ask questions and we were put here to answer questions – on the fourth consecutive time of asking, if I may say so.

165 Madam Speaker, the whole point of the original answer was to tell the hon. Gentleman that we shall make a statement in respect of who will be using Joshua Hassan House and for what purpose when the time comes and we have reached that determination. Asking the first question in a different way by way of supplementary is not going to elucidate a different answer.

170 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Chief Minister if he is able to show the House which departments are moving and to where? Are these in the private sector; and, if so, which buildings?

175 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, to the extent that those things have happened, they are therefore information that is in the public domain. To the extent that they have not happened but they are planned, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the Civil Status and Registration Office will be moving, and I understand that that move is already on foot and should be completed soon, and they are moving to a private sector location.

180 **Hon. R M Clinton:** I am grateful to the Chief Minister for that information. Would he be able to identify that private sector location, and can he advise the length of any lease that has been signed?

185 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, of course I am able to identify the location from my general knowledge because it is one of my departments. CSRO is moving to Leanse Place, but I cannot identify the length of the lease or other terms of it without being given explicit notice of the question.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q787-88/2024

Minimum Income Guarantee –

Number receiving supplement in 2023-24 and cost; total cost by year since 2021-22

190 **Clerk:** Question 787. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how many persons claimed and received the supplement to the Minimum Income Guarantee for the elderly during 2023-24 and at what total cost?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I will answer with Question 788.

Clerk: Question 788. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

200 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** What is the total cost of sums paid by way of the Minimum Income Guarantee for pensioners during the financial year 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

205 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, a total of 50 applications for Minimum Income Guarantee were received during 2023-24. Of these, two applications were awarded the supplement of the Minimum Income Guarantee, with a total of £636.

In relation to Question 788, the information requested, I am advised, is available on the government website.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: In relation to Question 788, I cannot find that information in terms of the total cost. What I do find on the government website is a table that gives some information, a table that gives bands of rates of the Minimum Income Guarantee, starting from zero to £5, going all the way up, in different bands, to £166 to £170. When you go across the table, it has the number of singles – meaning individuals – and couples receiving different bands, but you cannot work out the total sum expended from that table, and I have not seen any other information that tells you the totals. That is the reason for my question. I would be grateful, if the Chief Minister thinks it is there, for him to point me in that direction, but if he is talking about that table, I think he will find that it is impossible to actually calculate the totals.

220

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think the hon. Gentleman is right. I think that it tells him the number of people in receipt of a sum in that band. It is a pretty tight band, but it is the number of people receiving the amount in that band, and therefore he would not be able to work out where in that band they are.

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The band is a £4 band. That is to say he might be told there are three people – or three couples, depending on where it is – receiving between £166 and £170. He would not be able, I think he is right to say, to calculate the exact amount that is being paid on the Minimum Income Guarantee, so I have no difficulty, and those in my team who do these things will be hearing me say I have no difficulty, in sending the hon. Gentleman the sums for 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 which represent that total, after this meeting so that he has that total.

230

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am grateful for the indication that he will send me that information. In relation to the other question, Question 787, on the supplements to the Minimum Income Guarantee, may I ask him what the level of the supplement is? Is there a fixed supplement? Is there a discretionary band, and how is that calculated or awarded? Again, I ask that question because I cannot find publicly available information about that.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I believe that the sum is £318 for the supplement. I believe that is the amount. If he looks at what I told him in relation to the answer to the question, when I told him that it is two, that is why the answer given is £636.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I see, so it would be a fixed sum. If I make the comparison with the other question, there is a table of different bands, so are we saying that this is a fixed sum, or that there are not bands of this supplement? Is that correct?

245

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I am going to venture to say that that is the case, that when you get the supplement you get the fixed amount, but I will be corrected if I am wrong, and in writing to him in the context of the other answer I shall clarify that for him.

250

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q789/2024

Scam and fraud attempts on government entities – Amount defrauded

Clerk: Question 789. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

255 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, have the Government, government agencies, authorities or government-owned companies lost money in a targeting of government departments, agencies or authorities or wholly owned companies by scam or fraud attempts during 2024; and, if so, how much money was defrauded?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Chief Minister.

260 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, no.

265 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. The Chief Minister will be aware that during the summer there were a number of articles in the press about scams and people being targeted in Gibraltar – not a wide range of individuals, companies, entities. There was, in late July, an article that pointed to the Government also suffering from an attempt at fraud. The article said that the cybercriminals had also targeted Gibraltar Government departments and companies – in other words, wholly owned government entities – and that a government spokesman confirmed that departments and companies had been targets of recent phone scams and these incidents were being dealt with according to RGP recommendations. At that time, the Government did not wish to comment further, so what –?

270 **Madam Speaker:** I am just going to interrupt the hon. Member. I appreciate that I am getting ahead of the question that is put, but just as a reminder, a question should not be asked as to the accuracy of a press report or statement.

275 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, but I was not asking about the accuracy of the press statement; I am setting out the factual chronology of what was put out there, which gave rise to the question. Given the answer the hon. Member has given, which is that no money has been defrauded, can he confirm that there were not attempts to defraud the Government during that time?

280 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman will know that he has now asked me a different question to his first question. His first question specifically asked whether any of these entities, the Government and the wider government entities and companies, had *lost* money. That is why the answer to that was no, and that ‘no’ was not in any way mutually exclusive to the correct reference that the hon. Gentleman has read to what a government spokesman said at the time, because companies were targeted, which are government companies, but that did not result in any loss of money. I hope that is helpful to him.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q790/2024
Treaty on future relationship with the EU –
Update re negotiations

290 **Clerk:** Question 790. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can the Government update Parliament on the current state of negotiations for a treaty on a future relationship with the EU?

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

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, as I have repeatedly stated, it is important that we respect the confidentiality of the negotiating process. The hon. Gentleman is already aware that the last high-level quadrilateral political meeting in Brussels was held on Thursday of last week. I refer him to the joint statement issued in Press Release 599/2024. He is also aware that I appeared on *Viewpoint* that same evening to further inform the community of the issues. Since then, contact has continued at a technical level as we further intensify the negotiations.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, yes, indeed, I am aware of those developments. Given the contact continues and the backdrop of the importance – or it seems to us importance – of the events that might happen in November on the entry into the EU and so on, does that in any way have an impact on the timeline of the discussions? Does the Chief Minister envisage another high-level meeting involving Foreign Secretaries before November?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not think it would be prudent of me to say more about what the potential chronology of further meetings might be because, of course, in the context of a negotiation where nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, even potential next meetings are not agreed until there is something to agree on at them or there is at least an agreed agenda that might need to be taken at the level of Foreign Secretaries, Vice President of the European Union and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. But it is important for people to know, and I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is giving me the opportunity by this question to inform the community that it is not impossible that there might be other such high-level meetings in coming weeks or months. As I have said already, I do not want to fall into the trap of setting up any date in November as a cliff edge against which we would be negotiating, because that would not be in our interest as a negotiating party.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is it still the Government's position that it is a red line that there should be no Spanish officers in Gibraltar after a treaty, whether uniformed or not?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I think we have set out our position in this respect ad nauseam. The jurisdiction of Gibraltar is a matter for the law enforcement agencies of Gibraltar. At the same time, we have also been very clear and unequivocal in saying that we have always accepted, as we could not accept otherwise, that responsibility for the application of the rules and regulations of the Schengen acquis is not a matter for the Government of Gibraltar or the Government of the United Kingdom; it is a matter for the responsible Schengen authorities. In that context, we are very clear that on Gibraltar there only needs to be Gibraltar law enforcement agents, British law enforcement agents, enforcing Gibraltar's laws, including our immigration laws, and giving assurance to third parties in the context of what happens in and around Gibraltar.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Well, that may be, insofar as some aspects of it, of course, but the hon. Member knows that at least the New Year's Eve agreement alludes to the involvement of Frontex, and so what I was asking more specifically is whether it is still a red line for the Government as to the presence of Spanish officers on Gibraltar soil in the context of a treaty, if it comes.

Given his indication that it is impossible to give a specific timeline – and I understand that, from where he sits – have there been assurances given that the status quo on mobility across the border, so far, in terms of the arrangement on red ID card holders, will continue pending the conclusion of the negotiations?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, Frontex is not a law enforcement agency. I think that that is clear. Frontex is a European agency which can aid member states in respect of the provisions of the statute that creates Frontex and insofar as that creates jurisdiction in respect of Frontex.

350 The negotiations have progressed since they commenced in October 2021 and, indeed, from
the moment that the New Year's Eve agreement was concluded in December 2020, on the basis
of an assurance that Gibraltar would have the ability to see those who are at one stage resident
in Gibraltar, at least for the lion's share of that period, and then Gibraltar red ID card holders
continue to be able to access the Schengen area without the need to have their passports stamped
if they were going into Spain alone, but if they were going into the wider Schengen area requiring
355 to have their passport stamped. If I may say so, that, I think, is an arrangement that has worked
well and it has enabled red ID card holders – and, for a period, also blue ID card holders – to have
access to Spain, in particular in a way that did not engage the rule that applies already today in
respect of a non-EU citizen without a valid residence permit in the European Union being able to
access the EU for at least 90 in 180 days.

360 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** If he permits me, I think the Chief Minister has indicated his view and
analysis of how the arrangements have worked, but he has not specifically answered the question
whether there has been an assurance that those arrangements will continue pending the
conclusion of the talks.

365 May I ask him, while I am on my feet, is there an attempt – given that the negotiations continue
and there is no obvious immediate outcome because he does not have a view on the specific
timeline, or at least he cannot give an assurance on the timeline – to put in place interim
arrangements for those blue ID card holders or persons resident in Gibraltar who do not hold a
red ID card?

370 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the way that I answered the first part of the hon.
Gentleman's current supplementary when dealing with it when it was his previous supplementary
was by demonstrating to him that the process had worked but it has worked up to now. As he
knows, there are potentially new rules coming into play in respect of access to all parts of the
Schengen area, and he will have heard what I have heard the Spanish Foreign Minister say – in
375 public, not in the context of the parts of the negotiation that are held behind closed doors.

Finally, in the context of blue ID card holders, I could not sympathise more with blue ID card
holders. I think that their lives are being made unnecessarily difficult. In my view, it was possible
for blue ID card holders to continue to have the indulgence that they had been granted by the
Kingdom of Spain for a little longer. That indulgence has continued to be granted to red ID card
380 holders – in fact, we should always remember that although we use the terms 'red ID card holder'
and 'blue ID card holder', there is only one type of ID card and that is the red one; the blue is not
an identity card, it is a residence permit, which is different – but Spain has chosen not to do that.
There was a relevance at the time when Spain chose to do that, which was that Spain decided not
to accept the residence permit of British citizens resident in Gibraltar who are not red ID card
385 holders in the same month as the United Kingdom stopped accepting Spanish ID cards for the
purposes of travel into the United Kingdom. It has not been possible to persuade Spain to go back
to the indulgence that they were providing to blue ID card holders – or civilian registration card
holders – and it is not negotiable to seek to achieve that at this stage without an agreement.

390 Madam Speaker, politics is politics and I fully accept that. I fully accept that although the hon.
Gentleman says that he wants us to have a safe and secure and beneficial agreement which is
good for all Gibraltarians, I believe that if I come back with the most secure, safest and most
beneficial agreement done in the history of mankind – and I am not suggesting that I might, but if
I were to come back with the safest, most secure, most beneficial agreement done in the history
of mankind – the hon. Gentleman will find the fifth leg to the cat from his position, standing behind
395 the door, with the axe in his hand, waiting for me to walk through it, to suggest that it is neither
safe nor secure, nor beneficial. If it were not so important I might forgive him, but I am very clear
that that is what he is trying to achieve, and that is why I think it is very important that I do call
out any attempt to set up things which are non-negotiable as the thing which we should be trying
to achieve, like, for example, in what must be the latter stages of the negotiation – please God, I

400 am not in the beginning of this negotiation; I do not think my sanity, or my 'sanitary', as the Hon.
Mr Origo might suggest, would see me through it – that we should now go back and deal with the
issue of one type of civilian registration card holder colour. What we have to do is finish the
negotiation, finish it safely, securely and beneficially in the judgement of the Government of
Gibraltar, because it will be the Gibraltar Cabinet that determines whether what we come back
405 with can be considered to be safe, secure and beneficial, in which case we will then bring it to this
Parliament for debate and for approval. That is what we need to do, and that will clear the way
for fluidity of movement for all colour of civilian registration card holders and Gibraltar red ID card
holders.

410 If your enemy in a negotiation ... I use the word 'enemy' in its widest form. I do not think
'enemy' is the right word to use; I will be forgiven for that slip of the tongue. If your counterpart
in a negotiation is doing something to try to put pressure on you, the worst thing your purported
allies can do is point to that thing that your counterpart is doing as a thing that causes huge
pressure. I would leave it at that and allow the hon. Member to reflect on what I have said.

415 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, just one more question, if I may. I have to say the hon.
Member prefaced some of his closing remarks before he sat down on the basis that he thinks that
we are playing a game – presumably; he did not use the word 'game', but that I am putting
questions – and that whatever he does, because he put it that high, *whatever* he does, we are
going to find the fifth leg to that cat and be against it. I have always said that our position is that
420 we want a safe and beneficial agreement. He knows that we are putting questions and sometimes
disagree with him, but he knows also that he has had a lot of space from the Opposition to
negotiate that safe and beneficial agreement. I have always said that we will make that judgement
in due course, and I do not prejudge the assessment that we will make. He said that if the Cabinet
believes that it is safe and beneficial he will then bring it to this House for approval. Would that
425 be before or after the entry into the agreement by the EU and UK?

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not think we have debated this in the past six
months, but we have debated it before and I have given my answer before. It will be before
ratification by the United Kingdom.

430 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

EDUCATION, THE ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Q689/2024

**Derelict vehicles –
Number removed by RGP**

Clerk: We continue with questions on Education, the Environment and Climate Change.
Question 689. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

435 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, how many derelict vehicles per month have been removed
by the RGP in the past 12 months?

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

440 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
Speaker, I will avail myself of this wonderful facility.

The RGP no longer has this responsibility. This responsibility is now with GPMSL, who in the last 12 months have disposed of 240 vehicles, with a further 20 currently being dealt with.

445 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for that indication. Just one further question on this, and that is whether the hon. Member could perhaps confirm what has been done with all the vehicles. Have they all been destroyed, or have any of them been sold on?

450 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that. I think they will probably have been destroyed. There is a process which then is confirmed in a certificate of destruction, but it is information that I do not have here. I know they have been removed. I can get that information either at a future question or, if the hon. Member reminds me by email, I will seek that information before the next meeting of the House.

455 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I would be grateful if the Minister could spell out what GPMSL stands for.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, Madam Speaker: Gibraltar Parking Management Services Ltd, or words to that effect. I may not be quite right, but that is exactly what it is.

460 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q690/2024
Hot school meals –
Update re intention to provide

Clerk: Question 690. The Hon. E J Reyes.

465 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, can Government update this House in respect of its intention to provide hot meals for pupils in schools?

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

470 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the negotiations with the preferred bidder have not been fruitful. Should the situation persist, we will consider whether we should publish a new tender.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q691/2024
Hassan Centenary Terraces –
School catchment areas

475 **Clerk:** Question 691. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details of the school catchment areas residents of Hassan Centenary Terraces have fallen under as from September 2024?

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

480 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
 Speaker, the allocation of catchment areas to government schools is only relevant to the primary
 sectors, i.e. lower and upper primary. For the September 2024 cohorts, the allocation of school
 placement based on catchment areas for pupils entering Nursery, Reception and Year 3 were as
 follows for residents of Hassan Centenary Terraces. Nursery, Notre Dame Lower Primary;
 485 Reception, Notre Dame Lower Primary; Year 3, St Anne’s Upper Primary.

For the sake of clarity, school placements at St Martin’s and the secondary schools are not
 allocated according to catchment areas. In other words, to summarise, they have been allocated
 to the North District schools.

490 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q692/2024
Hassan Centenary Terraces –
Number of school pupil residents by school and year group

Clerk: Question 692. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details in respect of the number of pupils now
 registered as living at Hassan Centenary Terraces, showing the school and year group in which
 495 these pupils are enrolled for the academic year which has recently commenced?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
 500 Speaker, I now hand over a schedule with the information requested.

Madam Speaker: We will move on to the next question and come back to this one.

Answer to Question 692/2024

		EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT													
		GOVERNOR'S MEADOW LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	NOTRED DAME LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST BERNARD'S LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST JOSEPH'S LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST MARY'S LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST PAUL'S LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST MARTIN'S SCHOOL	BISHOP FITZGERALD UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST ANNE'S UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST BERNARD'S UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL	ST JOSEPH'S UPPER PRIMARY SCHOOL	BAYSIDE SCHOOL	WESTSIDE SCHOOL	GIBRALTAR COLLEGE
School Year	Nursery	0	4	1	0	1	3	1							
	Reception	0	2	0	0	1	1	0							
	Year 1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
	Year 2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0							
	Year 3							0	0	0	1	0			
	Year 4							0	0	0	0	0			
	Year 5							0	1	0	2	0			
	Year 6							0	1	1	1	0			
	Year 7							0					0	1	
	Year 8							0					4	1	
	Year 9							0					0	1	
	Year 10							0					3	0	
	Year 11							0					1	0	
	Year 12							0					1	0	0
Year 13							0					1	0	0	
All Levels														2	

Q693/2024
St Joseph's Lower Primary School –
Intended works

Clerk: Question 693. The Hon. E J Reyes.

505 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide details and timescale of the works it intends to carry out at St Joseph's Lower Primary School, inclusive of the playground?

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

510 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the project is currently in the design stage following discussion with the school. The proposal is to carry out works in three phases to allow this to proceed in a functioning school. No timescale is yet available as this will depend on the detail of the design.

515 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I understand that, Madam Speaker. I am grateful for the answer. I did conclude my question by saying 'inclusive of the playground'. Can we have confirmation of that in those plans? The playground I think might possibly require resurfacing or perhaps even levelling. May I have assurances that that is also being carefully considered?

520 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the level and the slope in St Joseph's Schools' playgrounds – Lower Primary in particular, but both St Joseph's Schools – have been a cause of great consternation for a long time. It is something that has been brought to my attention not only by the head teachers and the staff but also by my grandchildren, who have been there for quite a number of years; my granddaughter is now in the last year in St Joseph's Upper Primary,
525 looking forward to going to Westside School. We are solving that problem in the plans that were actually in a pre-design stage as a concept – I believe we put them in the manifesto – building a floor of additional specialist rooms in the playground, with a flat, horizontal, properly surfaced playground on the roof. That is one of the phases of the plans that we are looking at, at the moment, so it will deal with the sloping playground.

530 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am extremely grateful. It is always reassuring that the Minister shares, as I do, the pleasure and the privilege of having grandchildren in those schools. I am one slightly better than him in that I am a past member of staff of one of the St Joseph's Schools, but it does not matter.

535 I know I am being over pressurising, but on timescales any idea at least by when he hopes to have those original plans? It seems that school started yesterday, and you already hear parents making arrangements for the mid-term break in a few weeks' time, so time does fly.

540 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the classical answer is 'during the lifetime of this Parliament'. As I said, we are in the design stage, architects are involved and we need ... It is a complex thing, particularly because, as I said, any works here would have to be phased because they would have to be carried out with a functioning school and we have to minimise disruption. I cannot really say. It is complex, but as soon as we know, we will know.

545 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q694/2024

**Zero tolerance on school premises –
Implementation of policy**

Clerk: Question 694. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: What process do schools undertake in their implementation of zero tolerance within school premises, both in respect of pupils and parents/guardians visiting the school?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, schools have a duty of care for the health, safety, security and well-being of all pupils and staff. This duty of care incorporates the duty to safeguard all members of the school community from subjection to any form of harm, abuse, nuisance or inappropriate influence. In performing this duty, schools recognise that there can be no complacency where child protection and safeguarding procedures are concerned.

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The Department of Education advocates that each incident of inappropriate or serious behaviour involving children and young people is investigated and that sanctions are applied relative to the pupil's intent, supported educational needs and disabilities and/or circumstances. We advocate that staff work with pupils and their families, in collaboration with external agencies, to help the children, parents and carers understand the consequences of their behaviour. The focus is on understanding why certain behaviours have presented, using this as a learning opportunity to bring about longer-lasting change.

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All schools require that all visitors, without exception, comply with the policy on visitors to schools and with the government zero tolerance policy. In addition, all government schools have a positive relationships/behaviour management policy which clearly frames each school's expectations of its pupils.

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The key processes which schools follow in implementing zero tolerance within premises for all stakeholders include policy development and communication signage, pupil information and assemblies, parent information and assemblies, information on school websites, bulletins and/or newsletters, school handbook, PSHE lessons, role modelling by adults in and out of lessons, peer modelling, INSET and staff CPD. Schools clearly communicate pupil expectations to pupils and reinforce these on an ongoing basis through all teaching and education staff.

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The zero-tolerance policy and positive relationships/behaviour management policy are shared with pupils, parents and carers, and staff through different channels depending on the educational setting and the ages of the pupils. These include pupil handbooks, communication with parents, assemblies, PSHE, Seesaw/Google classrooms, notices around the school, bulletins and newsletters, as I have said. Through these channels the school community and all stakeholders interacting within it are helped to understand the importance of a safe and happy school environment.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, I have received a good, detailed explanation of process, but if I can home in on particular incidents, should, unfortunately, there be physically aggressive behaviour, is there a procedure whereby the school has to report it up along the line, perhaps even reaching a possible investigation by the RGP because it could even be an offence? Perhaps the Minister, in his detailed answer, can home in a bit more on this issue.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Absolutely. Madam Speaker, there could be a range of instances, from minor misdemeanours by children to an act of aggression like somebody wielding a knife – a member of staff, a visitor or one of the pupils. Where necessary – and it has happened, fortunately

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rarely, but it has happened – instances have to be reported to the Police and the Police have to attend. That is absolutely the case. Hopefully this is not something that is going to happen often.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Given the long policy exposition that the Minister gave us as to the rationale and the attitude that the Government takes in relation to zero tolerance and behavioural management in schools, but given also the concerns that have been expressed by teachers at Westside, does he accept that the policy is not working?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Do I accept that the policy is not working? No, Madam Speaker, I do not.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Does he not accept that the concerns that have been expressed by teachers are well made?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, there is another question on the Order Paper where I refer to those representations by NASUWT. They are the subject of discussion at the moment and the behaviour policy is under discussion to see, using the experience both of our local teachers and Education Department and NASUWT, whether we can improve it. It is active negotiation. If considering your policy in order to improve it is an acceptance of something not working, I do not accept that. Can things work better? Yes, they can. Are we working towards improvement? Yes, we are. But I cannot accept a blanket statement suggesting that our policy in schools in Gibraltar in general is failing as a result of that allegation in that school.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q695/2024
Pupil suspensions –
Number since January 2024

Clerk: Question 695. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: Can Government provide details in respect of the number of pupils, together with generic reasons, who have been suspended from school since January 2024, indicating the school sector where the pupil is or was enrolled and duration of suspension?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, 30 suspensions involving 21 different pupils. The generic reasons are disrespectful behaviour and abusive language, unkindness, aggression towards others, damage to property, vaping and smoking. They are all in the secondary sector and the duration is from one day to two weeks, depending on the case.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful for that, Madam Speaker. Perhaps I was not clear enough in my question. The Minister said the duration varies, from one day onwards. I believe there are cases where an incident may happen in the course of the morning classes and the pupil is then suspended for the rest of that day. Is that included in the one day? I think there may be different subtotals there.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: I believe that those are included as a one-day suspension, but I would need to confirm that.

640 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Yes, I would be grateful. It just helps to complete the statistics table, whether that means one day, because if I get suspended on a Thursday and am told not to go back to school till Monday, then it will probably be two days, but if I am allowed to return tomorrow morning for registration ... That would help to clarify the statistics.

645 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I am very happy to clarify that for the hon. Member and exchange information with him. I am sure he will remind me if he does not get it within the next few working days.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q696/2024
Wellbeing Support Team –
Number of teachers/instructors with access to services

Clerk: Question 696. The Hon. E J Reyes.

650 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide a breakdown for the academic year 2023-24, showing the number of teachers/instructors who have access to services provided by the Wellbeing Support Team, indicating the school sector in which these teachers/instructors are employed?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, the figures for seeing people in one-to-ones, with an average of three sessions per person, are primary 13 and secondary 33.

660 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, is there no distinction between upper and lower primary?

665 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I have been provided these figures pooled together, again something that I suspect we will ... This has been provided to us by the Wellbeing Team. I can go back to them, but these are the sectors as they have been given to us.

670 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I apologise. I think the way I worded question when I put down 'the number of teachers/instructors' ... In compiling the information, I believe there is another category, which is the Learning Support Team and so on. Can the Minister, when he is seeking the information, try to conclude that those figures are there, because there are teachers who are instructors, who are normally graduates who have not undertaken a PGCE. Music is one that comes to mind, but there are also a lot of learning support staff who are, strictly speaking, not teachers or instructors; they are supporting staff.

675 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Yes, they are not teachers. I have asked for the information regarding teachers or instructors. Instructors, as the hon. Member knows, do teach/instruct without ... Obviously their terms are different, and qualifications and so on.

680 This probably does not include SNLSAs. It is not included in the question, so it is not included in the answer. Again, I am happy to answer that question on another occasion or obtain that information for him.

Clerk: Next question.

Q697/2024

**Discipline in schools –
Actions to address NASUWT/GTA concerns**

Clerk: Question 697. The Hon. E J Reyes.

685 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Can Government provide information on what it intends to do to address the concerns expressed by NASUWT/GTA in respect of alleged deterioration of discipline/pupils' behaviour in schools?

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

690 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I alluded to some of this in reply to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. These concerns which Gibraltar NASUWT alleges have occurred in one school are being actively addressed, with constructive meetings to that end being held every fortnight between the Department of Education and NASUWT. I should just point out that that includes NASUWT and the local branch together at these meetings with the Department of Education.

700 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, in public statements NASUWT have signified that they have a mandate, if need be, to carry out some type of industrial action and so on. Can the Minister confirm if any industrial action has been put into effect by the teachers' representatives?

705 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I can confirm that it has not. We are actively and constructively engaging, reviewing policies, trying to look forward, to see, as I said earlier, whether we can make any improvements, and learning from situations in the past. As these constructive negotiations or discussions are proceeding, there has been no industrial action at this point in time.

710 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Finally, Madam Speaker, the Minister, in his answer, homed it down by confirming that it mainly refers to issues concerning one of our schools, but because the union group representative of all teachers ... any outcomes and so on will be something that will be spread out and implemented throughout all schools, or is the Minister aiming at a solution just for the one particular school in question?

715 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Any lessons learnt and improvements, if they require implementation or tweaking of behaviour policies in other schools, would obviously cascade around to others. We are waiting to see how these discussions conclude. As I said, they are held every fortnight in a very constructive spirit. I am sure that we will end up agreeing, and if we all learn from this, well, it is a good thing and we will have made progress.

720 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** The Hon. Minister, in answer to my colleague, talks about the possible review or impact on policies that there might be, but is that the only thing that he envisages in those discussions might change, or are the discussions also addressing things that are not documents, that there are resources or other matters that might be impacted as a result of those discussions?

725 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** I am not present in these negotiations myself; they are led by the director and her team. There is no closed agenda and therefore other matters may arise, not only in relation to behaviour but over a broad range of other things. Clearly at the moment the focus is on this particular aspect, but it is not a closed agenda and other things are discussed, and I encourage them to do so.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q698/2024

**Mandatory scholarships –
Number awarded in 2024 and total number currently funded**

Clerk: Question 698. The Hon. E J Reyes.

Hon. E J Reyes: How many new mandatory scholarships have been awarded in 2024, and what
735 is the total number of mandatory scholarships currently being funded?

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
740 Speaker, as at 20th September, when the answer was prepared, 442 new mandatory scholarship
awards have been awarded for the 2024-25 academic cycle; and as at 20th September, the
Government is currently funding 927 students via the mandatory scholarship route for funding.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q699/2024

**Discretionary scholarships –
Applications since 2019 and total number currently funded**

Clerk: Question 699. The Hon. E J Reyes.
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Hon. E J Reyes: How many applications have been received for discretionary scholarships since
2019; and, of these, how many persons were successful in their application, broken down by
750 academic year, together with the total number of discretionary scholarships currently being
funded.

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

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam
755 Speaker, as at 20th September, 89 government-sponsored students are currently being funded
through the discretionary scholarships funding route.

In 2019-20, 90 applicants were successful, but regrettably our current electronic system does
not have the information with regard to how many applicants applied through that route, in that
application cycle, because applications were previously received in hard copy.

760 There is a similar qualification for 2020-21, when 71 applicants were successful.

In 2021-22 we were able to gather the additional data. There were 74 applicants who applied
through the discretionary route. Of these, 47 were successful and 27 were unsuccessful.

In 2022-23, 54 applicants applied through that route. Of these, 24 were successful and 30 were
unsuccessful.

765 In 2023-24, 111 applicants applied through the discretionary route. Of these, all were
successful.

In 2024-25, the current year, 89 applicants applied through the discretionary route. Of these,
63 were successful and 26 were unsuccessful.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, for the sake of clarity, in the figures for 2023, can the Minister
770 repeat how many applications we had and how many were granted?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: For 2022-23 or 2023-24?

775 **Hon. E J Reyes:** For 2023-24.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: 111, all successful.

780 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. In my notes, because I did ask in I think it was
Question 559/2023 and the figure given for 2023 discretionary scholarships was 149 granted, and
there was a running total at that stage of 175. Those figures do not tally with previous information.
Sometimes it happens that – I am pre-empting the answer – the Minister gives details of the
number of applications and then, for some reason or another, the student does not take it up.
785 Would he undertake to double check the figures as compared to the answer he was able to
provide to this House last time round?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, of course, Madam Speaker, absolutely. There will be an explanation.
We have come across these before. Sometimes students have dropped out and then the figures
do not tally, or there could be an error, but certainly I will find that information and share it
790 accordingly.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, given the figures that the Hon. Minister has given, as I
understand it, in September 2021 there were 74 applicants and 47 successful, so about, I guess,
loosely two thirds; in September 2022, 54 applicants and 24 successful – about half; and in
795 September 2024 there have been 89 applicants and 63 successful, so again around two thirds. And
yet in September 2023, 111 and all successful. Is that because it was election year and it was a
goodie?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, that is a very cynical way of looking at it. The
800 scholarships are recommended by the independent scholarship panel. They are graded in
sequence, depending on the points system, and it does depend on the funding that is available
that is voted here in Parliament every year. Where there are unsuccessful ... there is an appeal
process – again, it is an independent appeals panel – and these are the figures that have resulted
from that process.

805 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q700/2024

Distance learning scholarships – Applications since 2019 and total number currently funded

Clerk: Question 700. The Hon. E J Reyes.

810 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many applications have been received for distance learning scholarships
since 2019; and, of these, how many have been awarded, broken down by academic year together
with the total number of distance learning scholarships currently being funded?

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

815 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam
Speaker, as at 20th September, 62 government-sponsored students are being funded through the
distance learning scholarship route.

820 In 2019-20 there were 30 successful applicants. As I explained for the previous question, we do not have the data for how many applicants there were, just for the successful ones, and that applies for the next two as well. In 2020-21 there were 30 successful applicants. In 2021-22 there were 23 successful applicants. In 2022-23 there were 42 applicants of whom 28 were successful and 14 were unsuccessful. In 2023-24 there were 45 applicants of whom all were successful. And before they say anything, in 2024-25 there were 33 applicants, all of whom were also successful. This is not an election year.

825 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, thanks for statistics. However, in the past, when the Minister has answered questions in respect of distance learning, he has made a distinction. In 2023 he told me that of those granted as distance learning, 11 were actually mandatory scholarships who had decided to convert into distance. In the figures he has given me, especially this year, of the 33 that have been granted, how many were mandatory following the data as he presented it last year?

830 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, of the 33 this year? I suspect that filter will have already been carried out, so I will have to check. Perhaps the hon. Member and I could have a conversation later to see exactly what he is trying to ascertain. I am not altogether clear.

835 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q701-02/2024
Funded courses not successfully completed –
Number of individuals and amount owing to Government

Clerk: Question 701. The Hon. E J Reyes.

840 **Hon. E J Reyes:** How many students who were beneficiaries of scholarships are still debtors to date or must plan and commit to pay back government educational grants given to them, due to not successfully completing the course for which they were funded?

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

845 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 702.

Clerk: Question 702. The Hon. E J Reyes.

850 **Hon. E J Reyes:** What is the current total debt owed to Government by students and/or their guarantors due to not successfully completing the courses for which they were funded?

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

855 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the number of students that are currently debtors as at 20th September is 236. There is one student awaiting a repayment plan, for which the debt is not yet included in the final amount because they are still working on it, and there are five students awaiting a decision. These need to be confirmed; therefore, there might be an additional debt but this has not yet been established.

860 The total debt, other than those that are pending, owed to Government as at 20th September is £1,667,380.60.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, two small things. I will take the first one. The Minister said that there are some still awaiting a decision: a decision to be taken by whom?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: There is a process by which, if the student has given up for a cause such as a medical reason, there is an assessment in the Department and then there is a recommendation as to whether that student should be asked to pay back. There could be a legitimate reason – maybe the death of a very close relative, some health reasons and so on – and there is an assessment carried out. Those five are in the process of that assessment.

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Hon. E J Reyes: I am grateful; that does help to clarify. On a quick glance at previous figures, I am glad to see that the number of debtors has been reduced from 240 last year to 236. However, the bad news for those Members on both sides of the House who look after our pounds, shillings and pence is that the outstanding debt actually happens to be higher. So, we have fewer students but we are now owed more than what was owed a year ago. Is there any explanation that the Minister can enlighten us with?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, different students will have different amounts that they owe. If a student has given up a four-year course three years into it, they are going to owe more than a student who has been paid one term and then gives up. There is not a direct relationship between the amount of money owed and the number of students, so it does not quite work out in the way that the hon. Member has suggested.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you. Madam Speaker, because the two questions were housed together, has the Minister heard from his staff, the Director of Education and his advisers, any concern in respect of the reasons for the number of dropouts? Shall we call it that unkind word? Is there any rise for concern, or does it tend to be a pattern that has been established over the last x number of years?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: There is a very wide range, Madam Speaker. There could be health issues; there could be mental health issues. We are aware that for young people it seems that the Covid pandemic had an effect on mental health, and that may be showing now. The universities are now sometimes lowering the entry requirements with the inclusion of more foundation courses. The Department is very careful in trying to advise young people who they feel may not be up to a degree, and they do try to encourage them not to try to stretch themselves beyond what it is likely that they can achieve. But we also encourage young people to improve themselves. It may be that they are not as qualified or as able to carry out specific courses. It is a wide range of issues but it is not new. If anything has increased, it may be the mental health issues, but this is an ongoing thing and students have been giving up courses for as long as courses have been held, even in the time when we went to study; we all have friends who did that.

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Q692/2024

**Hassan Centenary Terraces –
Number of school pupil residents by school and year group –
Supplementary questions**

Madam Speaker: Before we move on, I will invite the hon. Member to ask any supplementaries to Question 692.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, very short comments on this. First, overall, given the total number of students who are registered as living in Hassan Centenary Terraces, I am

surprised. It does seem a little bit low, given the number of units there, but I do not know, perhaps the Minister is aware of some reason – maybe some are still in the process of moving in or simply have forgotten to inform the school of their new address. If he has any information in that respect ...

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But the one I am homing in on ... He had previously announced the catchment area, which is basically, for lower primary, Notre Dame, and for upper primary, St Anne's School. I see from his chart that there are students pertaining to those schools. However, there are, in the reception year, students choosing to go to St Mary's Lower. Even in the nursery, they are choosing to go to St Bernard's Primary and so on. Is this as a result of requests submitted by the family, requesting transfers, or is it because the schools did not have the room to take in the pupil and therefore they were sent to the old address?

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, again, it is not that straightforward. If a family moves location and the child is already in a school outside their new catchment area, the child is allowed to continue in that school unless the parents request a change. So, that is the first thing: we do not want to interrupt ... Then there could be cases in which it has not been reported, but remember that we do get requests for transfers when, for example, a grandparent lives very close to another school and the parents prefer, because of the pick-up by the grandparents, that the child go to another area outside their catchment area. We try to accommodate them – it is not always possible – so that may also be the reason why there are some children who are outside the new catchment area. I suspect it will all settle down once the Centenary Terraces are more populated and have been available for longer, but I think within all that there is scope for explaining why there are children scattered in other schools, even though they live in that wonderful new location.

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Hon. E J Reyes: Madam Speaker, again referring to previous answers, given the number of pupils now residing within that housing estate, and looking towards the future, is the Minister able to say that he is confident that the identified schools, namely Notre Dame and St Anne's, would be able to cope with the numbers of those projected to come into their schools, or does he already have certain plans in mind to extend pupil capacity within those schools?

935

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: At this moment, we are confident that we are covered for the next few years at least, so yes, I am confident that at this point in time we are not expecting any difficulties. Remember that a lot of the families will be moving there and vacating the other schools, so the dynamics currently do not worry us.

940

Hon. E J Reyes: And, beyond the lifetime of this House, if one looks forward to four years' time, there will probably be a baby boom in that estate given that bedroom compositions will allow families to expand.

945

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, we will still be here to deal with that, too.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q703/2024
Glacis Estate –
Road safety

950

Clerk: Question 703. The Hon. C Sacarello.

955 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Good afternoon. Madam Speaker, there is a growing public concern for the safety of residents of Glacis Estate as a result of the speed of diverted traffic entering the estate off Winston Churchill Avenue. Will the Government seek to address this urgently and head off a potential disaster?

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

960 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, this temporary access road was opened in order to allow works to divert the main stormwater culvert out of the one Bayside development. This was done in order to provide direct access into the eastern side of Glacis Estate and avoid the loss of parking spaces within the estate, as otherwise there would have had to have been a two-way traffic flow system within the estate.

965 Bayside Road has now reopened and traffic through the temporary road has reduced. The issue of excess speeding had not been referred to the Ministry and has now been taken up with the RGP. Meanwhile, temporary speed bumps are being placed on site; in fact, I believe they have been placed this week. In addition, the Highways/Traffic team will be meeting up with the tenants' association to address any concerns that may remain.

970 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for his extensive reply. I would just like some clarification, if possible at all, please, because these concerns were expressed to me by residents of the area, not just for the vulnerable, young and old, who might zip across and fall victim to a speeding car, but also run-of-the-mill people who live there.

975 The Minister mentioned that there were speed bumps. Could he possibly explain the exact location? Are they as they come off Winston Churchill Avenue into the estate, into that little car park? Thank you.

980 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I am trying to avail myself of modern technology because I may have a photograph of the location. This is at the entrance of Winston Churchill Avenue, just as you come in, so you have to slow down, otherwise you will get bumped. I repeat: had that entrance not been provided, Glacis Estate would have had to be two-way from the western side, and there would have been a loss of parking. As the hon. Member will be aware, there is a need to keep parking there because of all the works that have been going on, so we worked very hard to do that and hopefully the speed bumps will now resolve the problem.

985

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q704/2024

Vandalism in public car parks – Performance of security company

Clerk: Question 704. The Hon. C Sacarello.

990 **Hon. C Sacarello:** I have received numerous reports, Madam Speaker, on issues relating to repeated security and vandalism in our public car parks. The Government already pays a security company to prevent these low-level crimes. Is the Government happy with their performance?

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

995 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the Government is happy with their performance and is working with the security company on how to reduce these instances of vandalism.

1000 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for his reply. However, I would express the concern of the public where the users of this car park have to traipse past all sorts of nasties as a result of damaged doors and open access. Is the Government seriously satisfied with this and, by extension, their own performance with the car parks, which have continued in this condition for years? Have years of failure not brought them to conclude that they must try something different?

1005 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that I have just given.

1010 **Madam Speaker:** Yes.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, we have heard reference to a security company. Would the Minister be able to identify the security company for us?

1015 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I believe I know which it is, but I would need to be absolutely sure before I actually name it. I would rather check that fact and provide it on a later occasion. I will check it; I am not absolutely sure.

1020 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to Minister, but does he not see it as a bit bizarre that he does not know the name of the company but he is satisfied with their performance? How can he equal that?

1025 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, there is absolutely nothing irreconcilable about the two answers. The hon. Gentleman has asked the Minister the exact name of the company, no doubt so that he can search it at Companies House, which is his prerogative if that is what he wishes to do. Having the exact name of a company in order to enable a person to search it at Companies House, if that is what they wish to do, is quite different to knowing whether or not you are satisfied with the performance of the company, the exact name of which, for search purposes, you might not be able to recall exactly.

1030 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, the Chief Minister is presuming the rationale for my question. I am merely asking the name of the company so we can link up that company to any other contracts that may have been awarded by the Government, but the Minister seems to be satisfied with the performance of a company he cannot identify.

1035 **Hon. Chief Minister:** No, Madam Speaker, that is not what the Minister has said, although if the hon. Gentleman wants to say that I am presuming what he is going to do with the name of the company, he can presume, if he likes, that that is what the Minister is doing, but he would be completely and utterly wrong, as he is about most of what he says in this House. The reality is that you can be satisfied with the performance of a company and not be able to name it exactly, whether that is for the purpose that the hon. Gentleman says I have presumed or for the purpose which we must all ensure that we advance, which is not to say something in *Hansard* which is not entirely correct.

1045 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may?

Madam Speaker: Yes.

1050 **Hon. D J Bossino:** To the question that we are all dwelling upon at the moment, given that the question itself refers to a security company and given that the Hon. the Minister does not have the information, or he has an idea of what the name of the company is but he says he wants to be accurate insofar as his reply is concerned, is it possible for the hon. Member to provide the answer later on in this session – it is relevant and it does arise – rather than let it just go on the never-never and for my hon. Friend to have to ask another question at the next session? I think it is something which arises as a result of the question filed.

1055

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q705/2024
Theatre Royal car park –
Cleaning

1060 **Clerk:** Question 705. The Hon. C Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: When was the Theatre Royal car park last cleaned, and how often is it done?

1065 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, let me just add that my Departments deal with several security companies. I need to be careful to know which deals with which different sections. I could give the wrong answer. This is why I need to check.

1070 Madam Speaker, the Theatre Royal car park is a private car park and is not cleaned by the government contractor.

1075 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful for the answer. Could the Hon. Minister clarify, if it is a private car park, is there no connection whatsoever by way of lease or underlease to the Government at all?

1080 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, Madam Speaker, my team inform me that we are not involved in the cleaning of that car park because it is a private car park. I cannot know how often it is cleaned or who cleans it, and so on; it is a private car park.

Hon. C Sacarello: If it is private, does the Hon. Minister mean it is owned by a private company? If so, could he please mention the name of that company?

1085 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, if it is private it is private. It is owned by somebody, I assume it is a private company, but it is not owned by the Government.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q706/2024
Mid Harbours public toilet –
Maintenance

Clerk: Question 706. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1090 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, could the Minister please explain why the public toilets in Mid Harbours Estate are suffering from a long-term spell of no maintenance?

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

1095 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the hon. Member is wrong to suggest that the Mid Harbours toilets are suffering from anything. In fact, the Mid Harbours public toilet was closed in 2019 at the request of the committee of the Mid Harbours Small Boat Marinas, who are responsible for the building in which it is situated.

1100 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q707/2024
Provision of electric bus service –
Update

Clerk: Question 707. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1105 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Please provide an update as to when the Government will be providing an electric bus service.

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

1110 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, the tender process in connection with the smaller Upper Town buses is nearing completion, with the vehicles that have been proposed being reviewed by the tender board and by technical experts to consider their suitability in terms of size, overhang, torque etc. before test drives are organised. I am hopeful that this will result in electric or at least hybrid vehicles being selected. Tenders for the main fleet are expected to be published in the coming months.

1115 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. the Minister has distinguished the fleet ones that serve the Upper Town and then the rest of the fleet. I do thank him for his full reply. May I ask him to give us an idea of timings, at least as far as the first limb of his answer is concerned, the Upper Town: when he thinks that they will be up and running, they have done the test runs, and all the rest of it?

1120 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, I distinguished between the two because the Upper Town requires smaller buses and also it is quite narrow and hilly and so on, so they are different buses. I suspect that it will take maybe two to three months, so I would say, to be realistic, by the first quarter of next year at the latest.

1125 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And if I can press him in relation to the rest of the fleet, it is a longstanding commitment of this Government since I think when they first assumed office in 2011, and there were various reasons, as they have explained in the past, as to why it has not been possible to

1130 provide an electric bus service, but can he give an idea as to when we are going to be enjoying an electric bus service as regards the rest of the fleet?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, as I said, the tenders are expected to be published in the coming months. That is as much as I am able to say at this stage.

1135 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And is he more confident that this will now become a reality? From recollection, in my first term in this Parliament the reason why the initiative was shelved and did not progress was because the technology was not there. Is he now confident that the technology is there and that this will become a reality?

1140 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, technology wise, yes, I think that we have come a long way. Obviously we will have to wait and see what the companies replying to the tenders submit, but certainly the technology should be there. We would have to phase it, clearly, because they are not inexpensive, and we would have to look at the older ones first and so on, but that would be part of the process. So, I think technology wise, yes, but obviously it depends on what comes before us.
1145

Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. the Minister refers to expense. Is he able to provide any indication as to the cost of both fleets? I imagine he is likely to have more information insofar as the Upper Town Fleet is concerned, because that is closer in time to becoming a reality, and less in relation to the rest of the fleet, but does he have any information in relation to that?
1150

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that one is an active tender process and the other one will be a tender where we expect proposals to come forward, I do not think it would be appropriate for me to speculate on the possible costs.
1155

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q708/2024
Bus fares –
Card payment machines

Clerk: Question 708. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1160 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Are there plans to introduce card machines for the payment of bus fares?

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

1165 **Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes):** Madam Speaker, this is one on which we could have issued a press release but we held it back – referring to the exchange yesterday.

The Ministry and Gibraltar Bus Company Ltd management have been working on the implementation of card payment machines on our buses for some months. The card machines arrived at the bus depot at the beginning of September. Training has been given to management and has been scheduled for the drivers for this week. Upon completion of the training, the buses will have card payment facilities. This is expected to be operational within the next few weeks.
1170

Hon. D J Bossino: May I, on this side of the House, welcome the very good news? It has been an issue which has been brought to our attention, and indeed I have seen with my own eyes – so

1175 I can give direct and not hearsay evidence in relation to that – the difficulties which are faced by our visitors, who are required to pay because they do not benefit from the free bus service. There is a very strict rule which is sometimes applied, sometimes not, in relation to the provision of exact change, and that causes, I think, a very bad image as far as Gibraltar Inc. is concerned.

1180 Can the hon. the Member opposite give any information as to what the cost to the Government – to the bus company in this case – is going to be?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, I am afraid I do not have that information, but it was not an unreasonable cost. I am happy to provide that, either here or otherwise. It is precisely because of the shortcomings of the system that we have acquired them, and within the next few weeks visitors to Gibraltar will be able to pay by card.

1185 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Just because I think it is a relevant supplementary to ask, in my view, could I ask him to provide this information during the course of this session? I think I would be very interested to have that information, if he is able to easily have it made available to him by his officials.

1190 By way of a further supplementary question, if I may, Madam Speaker, how is the rollout going to work? Is it going to be immediately set up in relation to all the buses in the fleet, or is it going to be a phased process?

1195 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, the company has acquired card machines for all the buses and the intention is to introduce them on all the buses in one go.

1200 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Sorry, just one final question, if I may, and I know I am stretching it slightly but it is to do with bus fares and all the rest of it. Will it continue to be the Government's intention and policy for the bus service to be free of charge for residents, or is there going to be a change in that regard?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, ma'am.

1205 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mr Clinton.

Hon. D J Bossino: Just to clarify, for the sake of the record, yes that it is the Government's policy not to change, not that ...? I added something at the end which would be suggestive of a change.

1210 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Maybe I did not hear the bit at the end. I confirm there is no intention to change that, ma'am.

1215 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, may I ask the Minister who is the provider of the card payment facilities?

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: The name escapes me, but it is a well-known provider of card machine services. Again, I will have to get that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q709/2024
Appropriation Bill 2024 –
Training expenses for Transport Department

1220 **Clerk:** Question 709. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide a breakdown of Head 22 item 2(15) entitled 'Training expenses', amounting to £57,000, setting out the detail of what the expenditure relates to.

1225 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. Member puts this question now, given that it refers to the schedule of a Bill we debated in June and that the question is more appropriate at the Committee Stage of the Bill. Nonetheless, and without establishing any precedent in doing so, I am happy to provide the information.

1230 Training expenses relate to a vehicle examiner's course which took place in the UK at a cost of £18,000, approximately, and to other courses which are planned for later in the year for transport inspectors.

1235

Hon. D J Bossino: I think one is entitled to ask questions in relation to these items; it certainly has not been disallowed by the House. Indeed, I did raise it in the Committee Stage and I think the hon. Member invited me to ask further questions in the future. He may not recall, but this is why I ask it on this occasion.

1240 If he recalls, this is an increased expenditure from previous years. I think the figure – I do not have it in front of me – was in the £5,000 region. Can he provide an explanation for that? Is this training that is going to be ongoing into the future, so it is that level of expenditure that one is likely to see; or is it a one off, and then, in the future, the training will presumably continue to be done, going forward, in house? Is that what we are looking at?

1245

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, in taking over the Transport portfolio, I felt that there were gaps in how up to date some of the staff were and I felt it important that we should train them up. These courses, apart from the one that has already taken place, include one on heavy goods vehicle standards. It includes standards of international transportation of merchandise, which is relevant when heavy goods vehicles come in from across the border. It is related to the number of hours that are safe for drivers to be on the road in relation to the use of tachographs. I was not satisfied that we had that expertise, certainly not refreshed, and there was a need to upgrade the training of our very hardworking transport inspectors. Therefore, these were courses that we thought were justified. I do not expect a similar level of expenditure in future years.

1255

Hon. D J Bossino: Forgive me if he has answered the question already; if he has, I did not catch it. Is it all the transport inspectors who have benefited from this course, or is it only a few and then they cascade it down to the others?

1260 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** The course that has already taken place was for the vehicle examiners, and that was for all of them. All of the transport inspectors are expected to carry out this course. We are trying to get the course run in Gibraltar by UK experts and we are currently negotiating the details of that.

1265 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Finally, presumably the hon. Member is seeking to do that because the cost will naturally come down, and that must be the rationale behind that decision.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Yes, of course, Madam Speaker, flying one or two trainers in is going to be less expensive.

1270 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q710-11/2024
Cost of cycling measures –
Hoy Dorman audit; Europa Point Avenue cycle lane

Clerk: Question 710. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What was the cost of the cycle audit as contracted to Hoy Dorman?

1275 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 711.

1280 **Clerk:** Question 711. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, how much has the extension to the cycle lane at Europa Point Avenue cost?

1285 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, the total cost of the Hoy Dorman cycle audit is and was as follows. In the current financial year – which was, if I may explain, part of the process that had not been paid in the last financial year, although the work was carried out then – £8,200; and for the financial year 2023-24, £19,127.13.

The total cost of the extension of the cycle lane at Europa Point Avenue from Governor's Meadow School to the roundabout by Atlantic Suites was £19,123.96.

1295 **Madam Speaker:** First, any supplementaries in relation to Question 710?

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes. In relation to that, he may recall that this was a corrected answer that he gave when I posed the question about the cycle audits. I think the information that he gave the House, which he then corrected, was that it had been done in house – I think as a result of a supplementary that I posed. The question is: why wasn't this done in house? In the scheme of things it does not seem overly expensive, but why wasn't it done in house? And, if I may, is it the intention for this type of thing, in the future, to be done in house? I hope I am not straying into the hypothetical; I am asking his current intention.

1300 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Madam Speaker, if I may just clarify: the hon. Member means the cycle audit, not the cycle lane?

Hon. D J Bossino: I said audit – or did I say lane?

1310 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** No, I did not hear quite ... I am getting my new hearing aid next week, which will help, but he is referring to the audits? (**Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes.) Madam Speaker, this obviously was commissioned by my predecessor, and I think I gave an explanation in a previous

1315 meeting as to the reason for this audit. This was something new in Gibraltar. I think in future these audits can be carried out by our team. If I may give the hon. Member an example, the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking plan, which was done by an overseas consultant, is currently being reviewed by my Transport team and will be published within the next couple of months, done in house, and I suspect that unless there are particularly difficult routes or particularly conflicting interests in any particular area in which we do not feel we have the expertise ... I think we now have the expertise and I am certainly very confident that my team is able to do these things in house in the future.

1320

Hon. D J Bossino: I fully appreciate that he, as a Minister, will have a different view than his predecessors, which is what I gather from what the hon. Member is saying, and that is fine. If one wants to be really particular about it, there has been a slight change of government policy, but it is the Minister who has thought that this will result in a saving of expense because we have the expertise in his Department.

1325

I seek his forgiveness once again as to whether this information is already out there, but has the result of that audit been made public? I understand that the audit will have informed the policy decisions that the Government is pursuing in respect of the cycling lanes it is constructing and all the rest of it, but has the audit itself been published?

1330

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: Madam Speaker, I do not believe it has.

Hon. D J Bossino: Would the hon. Member have any difficulty in committing to publishing it?

1335

Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: If there is public interest in it, I would have no objections. I suspect it is a very technical-focused audit on particular routes, but I will have a look at it and take a view.

1340

Hon. D J Bossino: If he does not mind, I will pursue him on that. The hon. Member expresses a view as to the technical nature of it, but I think there is public interest, and for the sake of transparency I think the Government ought to be publishing it, so I will press him on it.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries in relation to Question 711?

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I only have one, which is just to ask if the Minister has the information as to how long this extension of the cycle lane was in terms of meterage.

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Hon. Prof. J E Cortes: No, Madam Speaker, I do not have the figures. I can picture it in my head, as I am sure the hon. Member can, but I do not have a figure. I am not going to try to guess it, or even try to work it out in Google Maps right now. It is information that can be made available, but I do not have it here.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE GIBRALTAR SAVINGS BANK

Q714-15/2024

**Public debt, cash reserves and net debt –
Figures for June, July and August 2024**

1355

Clerk: Questions to the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank. Question 714. 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 dates: 1st June 2024, 1st July 2024 and 1st August 2024?

1360 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I will answer this question with Question 715.

1365 **Clerk:** Question 715. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following dates: 1st June 2024, 1st July 2024 and 1st August 2024?

1370 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the gross debt, aggregate debt and General Sinking Fund on the dates requested were at the same level as previously provided.

1375 The cash reserves and the net debt for the following months were as follows. Cash reserves: June, £119 million; July, £104.2 million; August, £80.4 million. Net debt: June, £735.3 million; July, £750.1 million; August, £773.9 million.

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries: Next question.

Q716/2024
2022 Census –
Date for publication

1380 **Clerk:** Question 716. The Hon the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, can the Government update the House on the date for publication of the 2022 Census?

1385 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, the 2022 Census report is expected to be released later this year.

1390 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, I think the collation work of the census happened in around November 2022, so it is almost two years ago. Obviously these things take time. I am sure the hon. Member agrees with me that this is an important informational tool not just for Members of this House but to plan things and understand how the population is growing and how there is movement in particular sectors etc. because of the vastness of the census and the fact that it takes a snapshot every 10 years. When he says that there is an expectation, can I probe him a bit more about seeking an assurance, if he is able to give it, that it will be published this year? Or is that not possible given the state of the preparation of the document?

1395 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Madam Speaker, I cannot give him an assurance because I do not know at what stage it is. All I know is that the Department expects to complete it this year. The Scottish

1400 census, for example, was done in 2021 and still has not been published, so we are ahead of
Scotland in that.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am glad to hear we are ahead of Scotland but we are also much smaller
1405 than Scotland and it would be hoped, does he not agree, that we could get our census out this
year?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: The Statistics Department has been very prudential in its expenditure. If
the hon. Member looks at the Budget, he will see that their budget has been very well controlled
1410 and they only get a greater amount of money, as he knows, from having it voted in this House at
the time that the information has to be collected and sifted. This is one element of their work. The
people who are working there are doing it as conscientiously and as quickly as they can. I do not
think that I would want to spend more money by trying to get it a few months earlier. I think when
they are ready, they will publish it. It is not a thing that I think everybody is waiting for with bated
1415 breath to see what happens. Probably I will be the one who will be reading more of it than anybody
else.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND THE GIBRALTAR UNIVERSITY

Q712/2024

Government hostels – Plans for improvement re accessibility

Clerk: We return to questions on Housing and the Gibraltar University.
1420 Question 712. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government clarify its plans to improve government-owned hostels
located at the Queen's Hotel and the Sunrise Motel to ensure that they adequately meet the
needs of elderly residents and persons with disabilities in the future?

1425 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University.

Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila): Madam Speaker, the
Government is negotiating with a contractor on an extension at the rear of the Sunrise Motel. The
1430 plan is to also refurbish the current Sunrise Motel in full, which will of course include disability
requirements. The Government will be meeting with the contractor shortly.

Hon. A Sanchez: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister confirmed that the individuals living in the
Queen's Hotel hostel will be asked to move to the Sunrise Motel at the end of this month. These
1435 works supposedly will take a while to be completed. In the meantime, the accessibility of the
Sunrise Motel is not that great, and when we visited we could not see rooms that were adapted.
Inside the hostel, accessibility was not very good. What will be done in the interim period to
accommodate elderly individuals and persons with disabilities?

Hon. P A Orfila: First of all, they will not be moving at the end of this month, they will be moving
1440 at the end of next month, which is 31st October, Halloween. After that, we shall be taking it in
stages. We are going to take the people ... There are 22, actually. We have 23 who cannot be
located in the Queen's, and we have 22 who are resisting the move. We had this conversation

1445 yesterday, Madam Speaker. They will have to move. It will be staged. There will be room. Maybe, for the time being, they will have to share rooms, but they are aware of this and they are quite happy to do so.

1450 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister clarify how she understands that the individuals are quite happy to do so when they are refusing to move? I do not understand how she can say that they are quite happy to share when my understanding is that they are not happy to share and they are not happy with the move because they are refusing to move. I do not understand. Can she clarify this?

1455 **Hon. P A Orfila:** Yes, of course, Madam Speaker. Humans are creatures of habit, as we all know, and some people refuse to move because they are quite happy where they are, but the thing is that they have to move because the Queen's Hotel is going to be torn down, demolished. Therefore, they have to move. We are relocating them to the Sunrise. We are not throwing them out, we are relocating them. For the time being they will have to share. The people already there know that this is going to happen and they are quite happy to share with their colleagues. Then stage 2 will occur, which will be when we shall build, behind the Sunrise Motel, extra rooms which will then become the motel, which will move to the back. Then we shall refurbish the front, including the facade, and then the whole of the Sunrise Motel will be completely refurbished.

1460 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, I think perhaps the Hon. Minister might be misunderstanding the concerns of the residents of the Queen's, at least the ones who have been speaking to us. They do not seem to be refusing the move because they refuse to share; they are refusing to move because they seem to be tired of empty electoral promises that are made to them every time we get to election time and the Ministers turn up to the Queen's hostel and promise them new hostels and new housing that never seem to see the light of day. Instead, what they are met with are infestations of cockroaches, which we heard about yesterday, infestation of maggots, which we heard about yesterday, rodents, and deplorable living conditions which we have witnessed. We have seen for ourselves no running hot water –

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Is there a question?

1475 **Hon. A Sanchez:** – no – (**Hon. F R Picardo:** Speech.) Let me –

Madam Speaker: Continue.

1480 **Hon. A Sanchez:** We have seen no lights in many areas. We have seen deplorable conditions. We have seen no working lifts for elderly residents and persons with disabilities. I can continue, and the conditions in the Sunrise Motel are similar. We have been shown –

Madam Speaker: Now get to the question.

1485 **Hon. A Sanchez:** We are concerned with the capacity issues which we have been shown by staff and residents at the Sunrise Motel ... the fact that there is only one room available, an office that has been turned into a room.

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

1490 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Hon. Minister confirm how she intends to fit all the residents into the Sunrise Motel? Does she plan to cram them all into a room? Is that the solution?

1495 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, a lot of what the hon. Lady has said is just not true. (**A**
Member: Nonsense.) No, it is not, because I visited the Buena Vista Hostel before the general
election in 2011, and I visited a hostel that there used to be, known as the Workers' Hostel, on
Devil's Tower Road, before the election of 2011. I promised the people who were in both of those
hostels that we would move them out of those hostels into new facilities, and we did, and so the
hon. Lady is completely wrong to talk about empty promises at election time, about moving
1500 individuals out of a hostel. We made those promises and we fulfilled those promises. We took
people who were in dormitory-style arrangements at Buena Vista, with cockroaches, with rats,
with maggots, with no lights, in an area that had been found to be unfit for human habitation –
not the situation in the hostels today – and moved them to a three-star hotel that was the Queen's
Hotel, and to a three-star hotel that was the Sunrise Motel. There have been maintenance issues,
1505 nobody is disputing that, but now we are moving them, as we promised to do – not an empty
promise – to a new, refurbished facility at the Sunrise Motel, which will include expansion that
the Minister has already talked about. So, it is not a question of shoehorning people into a facility.

The hon. Lady has to realise that the word that we are dealing with here is not 'hotels' with the
's' at the end; it is 'hostel' with the 's' in the middle, and the word 'hostel' implies dormitory-style
1510 arrangements for sleeping. So, if there are going to be dormitory-style arrangements for
sleeping – in some cases entirely, in some rooms, and in some cases only for a period – then that
is entirely in keeping with the definition of what is provided for in a workers' hostel and is entirely
in keeping with what we are committed to provide, what we promise to provide and what we will
provide.

1515 The hon. Lady may like it or not, but our promises, as we made them before the general
election to these individuals and to others, are going to be complied with insofar as we believe
that we comply with them in providing them in this way. Those are our obligations, that is what
we are going to ensure that we do, and we are going to do it in a way that ensures that neither
now at the Queen's and Sunrise hotels nor in the future in the new facilities do we ever find
1520 ourselves with Gibraltar being the subject of international objective criticism for our failure to
provide a place fit for human habitation for those who need to rely on workers' hostels, which is
exactly what we found when we were elected into government and exactly what we were dealing
with when we were in opposition. The views of Members of the Opposition are, of course, party
political, of course self-serving and not the objective international criticism that Gibraltar was
1525 facing in 2011 when we were first elected.

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

1530 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** International criticism of our hostels is longstanding because it was not
perhaps only there ... The hon. Member has a longer memory. He will remember that there was
international criticism when the GSLP was also in government previously. When he talks about
2011, it is 13 years ago now and there have been subsequent promises about the relocation of
these individuals and the improvement of the workers' hostel facilities. Workers' hostel promises
are made from time to time, projects are announced, they are not really followed through. We
1535 are where we are, and that is the situation.

May I ask the Hon. Minister to give us a better understanding of the extension proposal on the
Sunrise Motel? How many rooms are we talking about that would be built at the Sunrise Motel,
so that people are not kept in communal facilities for a long time, so that we do not go full circle?
At the end of the day, if the Hon. Chief Minister criticised communal housing and cockroach
1540 infestation, we do not want to go full circle so that we put people in communal housing and they
sustained cockroach infestation and maggots only a few weeks or months ago. We do not want
to go full circle, presumably. So, can we have a better understanding of the extension proposal?
How many rooms? Who is the contractor that will do this? Is there a preferred contractor or is
this going out to tender?

1545

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman, of course, is entirely right. One of the things I have always thought about him is that he is a great professional at what he does, although I do not share his politics, and he can count, and the election in 2011 was 13 years ago. But he would also be right to be reminded that it was not just international criticism and it was not just the GSLP Liberals who were criticising the GSD and the then GSD leader for the state of the hostels; it was also the PDP and its then leader criticising the GSD and their record at the time, although of course that is now the same person. The leader of the PDP is now the leader of the GSD attacking the GSLP Liberals for the state of our hostels, which are nowhere near the deplorable state that we found when we were elected.

Let's be clear: of course there are issues in the hostels. One of the problems we have had in the 13 years that we have been in government – because we have won four successive general elections, I think three of them involving him losing general elections; or two, I lose count – has been that it is difficult sometimes to maintain hygiene in the hostels, not for want of trying, not for want of support, but we have to realise that that is a reality. We have a situation today where we want to improve the lot further of the people whose lot we already improved from what we inherited from them in 2011, 13 years ago – although the fact that it is 13 years ago does not stop them referring to things that they want to refer to more than 13 years ago, 28 or 29 years ago. That means that we are going to ensure that we have not come full circle, that we are not going to tolerate the things that working men had to tolerate in 2011 when we were elected. What we are seeking to do is improve things even further than we have already.

Hon. Members will forgive me for not taking at face value – as the Hon. Mr Bossino said yesterday that they did not take of me, or at least of us – the things that they tell us they found at the workers' hostel, because they are, of course, partisan in their approach. We will take the views we are given by the Environmental Agency, by those who are responsible to us for the maintenance of the hostels, and we will continue to plough the furrow of delivering, as we have promised to do, the facilities that we promised, and we will make an announcement to the general public about what the circumstances of the extension of the Sunrise Motel will entail, who will be involved in delivering it, how we will choose who will be involved in delivering it, and the detail of all those plans when the time comes.

When hon. Members ask a question, we ensure – and you have reminded us of that – that we answer here, subject to those caveats. When we have a project to put out, we put it out when we think it is the best moment to do so in keeping with our views on the best way to inform the community of how that project is going to be developed. When we announce it, people will see it is designed to improve the lives of those who wish to or have to live in a workers' hostel in Gibraltar.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q713/2024
Halfway house for men –
Update

Clerk: Question 713. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide an update on the construction of the halfway house for men, as previously announced by the Government, by the Europa Point area.

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

1590 **Minister for Housing and the Gibraltar University (Hon. P A Orfila):** Madam Speaker, the
halfway house for men was part of the accommodation centre which was originally planned for
Europa Point. The intention is that this facility will be relocated to the Sunrise Motel as part of the
new project. This will be built at the rear end of the Sunrise Motel. The hostel will be completely
refurbished.

1595

Hon. D J Bossino: Wow! Okay, I have understood what the hon. Member has said, but in terms
of room configuration we are talking about something completely different, aren't we? From my
recollection – and I can check it – when the news came out that the Government had, a month
before the election, filed plans to construct this facility at the Europa Point area, we were talking
1600 of in excess of 200 flats and units. Is the hon. Member seriously saying that we are dealing with
like for like, that 200-odd flats will be built at the rear of the Sunrise Motel?

Hon. P A Orfila: Madam Speaker, all I can assure the gentlemen of right now is that everything
is being tabled with the contractors and I will have a clearer picture of what he wants when the
1605 time comes.

Hon. D J Bossino: But the hon. the Lady, with the greatest of respect to her, ought to have that
information here and now. A promise was, in effect, made by way of the application for planning
that was filed by her Government – a month, weeks, before we went to the polls – to do this, 200-
1610 odd flats. There would have been people who would have been very happy because they
themselves, from the information that we have – both Ministers opposite, the hon. Lady and the
Hon. Minister for Economic Development – visited the residents at the Queen's Hotel and
promised them a rehousing. They must have thought it was this. She is aware that she has been
placed under pressure by Action for Housing, only a few weeks ago, about an update in relation
1615 to this, and that press release was not responded to. Now we know why.

May I ask her further, can she please check her notes and provide us with the detail as to how
many flats? She must have that information available to her. It is not something that can be in the
air. This is an extension behind a building which is existing in Devil's Tower Road, which is the
Sunrise Motel. How can you compare that with what they promised in August 2023? One thing
1620 has got absolutely nothing to do with the other. I was quite calm this afternoon, but these things
rile me, for goodness' sakes. I know the Hon. Chief Minister may say I am angry, but these things
do anger me because injustices are being occasioned on 20 or 30-odd men and many other people
who need this facility; and, who knows, many people may have voted for them because they had
promised this to them. This is shameful behaviour. Can she please provide this information which
1625 she must have available to her?

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman's blood pressure
seems to have gone the route of my hypertension. I am afraid that the Government does not for
one moment consider that filing an application in the Development and Planning Commission
1630 amounts to a promise by any stretch of any definition. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman should know
that although Government Ministers sit on the DPC in their independent capacity, not as Ministers
to enforce any government whip because they are never whipped in the context of the DPC, the
DPC makes its determinations, such as they may be, even in respect of government projects. This
Government did not just open up the DPC so that everyone can see what is happening in the DPC
1635 and did not just publish the minutes of the DPC; we made the DPC a public process, whilst in their
time it was a private process behind closed doors. So, is it that he is saying – and I am trying to
understand his logic – that in our time, because we have made something public when we file
something, it is a promise, and in their time it was not because it was not public; in our time,
because the Government now subjects itself to the DPC procedure, when the Government
1640 subjects itself to the DPC procedure and puts a project in, it amounts to a promise, and in their
time it did not? So, we are fixed with something as a promise which in their time was nothing?

1645 On top of that, if what he is saying is right – and he has obviously given this absolutely no
thought, as he usually does when he opens his mouth – what is he saying about the DPC? Is he
saying that the DPC must approve government projects as they are submitted, or is he saying that
the Government is making, immediately, a promise that it knows it cannot fulfil if the DPC
1650 independently changes some part of the project? So, if we have coral gables on an application and
the DPC decides we are not to have coral gables on the building, we have failed in our promise to
produce the hostel in that way with coral gables because the DPC has said that it is not to have
coral gables? What the hon. Gentleman has said can withstand absolutely no logical assessment,
but that has never stopped him from saying those sorts of things.

1655 I would agree that during the course of a general election, if you say you are going to do
something and you do not caveat how you are going to say it and you then do not explain why
you may not be able to do it, you are breaching a promise, but that is not the situation that we
have here. What the hon. Gentleman has tried to do, which frankly intellectually infuriates me as
much as he is obviously passionately angered by this, is make something out to be a promise,
when it is not, in order to then say that we are breaching a promise and feign his anger. That is
not fair to the people who we all agree may need this project to go ahead. That is why what we
need to do is ensure that we deliver the project, even if in a slightly different way.

1660 Madam Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman is going to tell me that people thought that we were
going to do something at Europa Point and it was going to have magnificent views, and now we
are going to do it behind the Sunrise Motel and it is going to have different views, the first thing
you will be told in the DPC is that there is no right to a view, so that cannot be the issue that he is
taking. If he is taking the issue as to how many people are going to be housed in the halfway house,
well, we have not yet announced the plans. We will publish the plans; he will see how many are
1665 going to be there. We will subject them to the DPC again; that will not be a promise. We will see
what the DPC says. What emerges from the DPC we will then be able to build. That is the reality
of what being in government is about. I recognise that their experience of being in government is
one out of eight, and even then it is in respect of eight years, and even then – the hon. Gentleman
the Leader of the Opposition might not like me doing the mathematics, not because it is long ago
1670 in political terms but it might start to reveal his age – it is in the region of 20 years ago that the
last one of them who had experience in government left office. That is how things work now,
because you have an accountable Government that subjects its projects to the DPC, which do not
amount to a promise.

1675 For all of those reasons, everything that the hon. Gentleman said in the lead up to his question
was wrong.

Hon. D J Bossino: It is absolutely clear what the hon. Gentleman has done and what the hon.
Gentleman and Lady did during the election campaign. They filed the application. Yes, he may be
right, technically. I need to concede that. I was wrong. It was not an electoral promise because all
1680 they did a few weeks before an election was file the application at the DPC: 256 bedrooms, 106
rooms – very precise, very specific – at Europa Point. That did not have any influence on the voting
of the electorate and the people who were affected? I think very few people would accept that,
but technically I do not think it is in the manifesto, ergo, in that sense, it is not an electoral promise.
But actually, the point I made was that these individuals had been promised by the hon. Lady and
1685 by the hon. Gentleman to her immediate right that they were going to be rehoused. It now
transpires that they are going to be rehoused not here at the Europa Point fantastic, new, fancy
facility with views and all, and with these numbers, but at a dingy hostel at the Devil's Tower
Road – (*Interjection*)

1690 **Madam Speaker:** Question.

Hon. D J Bossino: – and the specific question which this Opposition is asking is: how many
rooms? It is simply not good enough –

1695 **Madam Speaker:** Question, please, or I will ask –

Hon. D J Bossino: I am in the process of asking it.

Madam Speaker: Ask the question.

1700 **Hon. D J Bossino:** – when the intention was that 256 rooms ... This was a project ... He may purse his lips and it may make him feel uncomfortable: he ought to be uncomfortable.

Madam Speaker: I am not going to ask the hon. Member again to ask a question. No more statements. Now ask the question, please.

1705

Hon. D J Bossino: Please provide information as to the number of rooms that the extension behind the Sunrise Motel will provide.

1710 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, I confess that the hon. Gentleman was right. I did purse my lips, but only at the sight of a Member of this House failing to follow your instructions. On behalf of the whole House, as Leader of the House I do apologise to you for that.

1715 Let's be very clear: it was not possible in August 2023 – and I am going to call her by her name, Pat Orfila, rather than the Hon. Minister, for that is who she was, and still is – for Pat Orfila to file anything in the DPC or to promise anything, because she was not a candidate selected by the Executive Committee of the GSLP in an election campaign, as the hon. Gentleman started by saying, because the then Chief Minister did not call the general election until after National Day, so there was no election campaign to speak of. So, what is the hon. Gentleman talking about? I know that they are constantly fishing around to find someone to blame for why they lost the last general election, which all of us think that they were en route to winning and managed to lose, but can they stop blaming us and start a little bit of introspection as to what happened on Friday, 1720 13th October last year and why it was a nightmare for the GSD and not for Gibraltar? I know that we are talking about 31st October and Halloween and all the rest of it.

1725 How can the hon. Gentleman say, with a straight face, 'It's terrible: they promised rehousing, and instead, they are going to deliver rehousing but in a dingy hostel'? Does the hon. Gentleman have to be reminded that beauty is in the eye of the beholder? What might be dingy to him might be delectable to somebody else. He has not yet seen the designs. The whole purpose of his question at the end, when he came to it, was to ask how many rooms was the design? We are going to give you the design. Maybe, in his heart of hearts, if he can bring his religious mores to bear, he might realise that actually this design is magnificent when he sees it, and he might even then say it. Or he might think it is magnificent and, for political reasons, say, 'It remains as dingy 1730 as I thought it was.' Really, Madam Speaker, if I may say so, with respect to hon. Members, *con la que está cayendo*. That this is what this House is concentrating on today, in this level of detail, is a remarkable demonstration of how well this Government is doing and how well this community is doing, despite what is happening in the world and in our part of it in particular.

1735

Hon. D J Bossino: My blood pressure is pretty low and my pulse rate is pretty low as well, thank goodness.

1740 May I make another attempt to seek the information from the Hon. Minister who has been assigned to this question, who is the Minister for Housing – quite properly; it is her responsibility. Given that we are going to have the move from the current resident licensees at the Queen's Hotel imminently, to the Sunrise Motel, in October, and therefore by Halloween – which, in our view, is going to be a nightmare for them, I would hasten to add – they are basically going to be moving into a construction site. That is what she is telling this House. Is the Hon. the Minister able to give us at least some indication ...? I know that she has to look at plans and all the rest of it, but by 1745 when does she think that the construction will have been completed? Does the Department have

an idea? Does she have an aim as to by when she thinks that this will be constructed and then these individuals properly housed?

1750 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, this issue affects many portfolios, so I shall continue to answer for the Government, especially given the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised issues which relate to the period before the general election when the hon. Member was not then in the Government.

1755 I am very pleased to hear that the hon. Gentleman has low blood pressure, because high blood pressure is a silent killer. Leave that to me. I am very pleased that that he has low blood pressure. I always knew he was a cold fish.

1760 The nightmare is on the 13th. Halloween is the day for moving, and that is a day of trick or treat. I give an undertaking to this House and to the people who are in that hostel that this Government will never trick them and that what we propose will be a real treat compared to the place where they lived in 2011 and an improvement on the place where we put them thereafter, which was already a huge step forward. The plans will be announced when the Government is ready. The period will be as short as possible for them to move into the new facility. In the interim, arrangements will be made which will be suitable and fit for human habitation, which is exactly what is our obligation to do.

1765 Madam Speaker, I am very happy with the progress that is being made in this respect. I am convinced it is in the interest of those we have a responsibility to in the hostel, and I would urge hon. Members to be a little bit more dispassionate and a little bit more objective about what the Government is doing in this particular area and set it in its historical context, even if it does mean going back 13 years, and realise how much of an improvement this will be to what has been there before, and even today.

1770

Madam Speaker: Time to move on.

Procedural

Clerk: Answers to Written Questions.

1775 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Before the Hon. the Chief Minister ... If I may, simply to go back to the –

Madam Speaker: I want to hear what the hon. Member has to say. I am not allowing any more supplementaries but tell me what it is the hon Member proposes to say.

1780 **Hon. D J Bossino:** No, I was not seeking your leave in relation to that, but simply I think the Hon. the Minister for the Environment had some questions that he was going to seek to provide during the course of this session. Is he able to? The idea in my head perhaps is completely wrong that he would have –

1785 **Madam Speaker:** The hon. Member is correct, that was discussed. Is the Hon. the Minister for the Environment in a position to give the information during the course of this session? Do you remember what the information was?

Minister for Education, the Environment and Climate Change (Hon. Prof. J E Cortes): If the session is going to be completed shortly, I will not have had the time and I will send that information subsequently, either directly to the hon. Members or at the next session.

1790 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I think there were two which impacted on my question and one which impacted on my hon. Friend here.

Madam Speaker: The way forward, then, is for hon. Members to remind the Hon. Minister what the information sought was, and then the Hon. Minister can deal with it.

1795 **Hon. Prof. J E Cortes:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I have made a note but I do not mind and I appreciate being reminded.

Questions for Written Answer

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to table the answers to Written Questions W83/2024 to W98/2024.

Birthday wishes to Madam Speaker

1800 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I have, now, the honour to move that the House should adjourn *sine die*. Before I do that, and without trying to do as the hon. Member did a moment ago and count years, I would like, on behalf of the whole House, to wish you a very happy birthday – I understand it is today – and also to wish you all the best in coming weeks, as you will be away from the House on a very happy personal journey.

Freedom of the City for Sir Bob Neill – Motion to be moved at the next meeting of the House

1805 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, the Government has not been able to move the motion in respect of the Freedom of the City of Sir Bob Neill – which I know enjoys the support of all Members of the whole House – because the Deputy Chief Minister and I were away in the period of preparation for the House. We very much intend to move it at the next meeting.

Adjournment

1810 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** I move, Madam Speaker, that the House should now adjourn *sine die*.

Madam Speaker: Thank you to the Hon. the Chief Minister and, through him, to all Members of the House for your good wishes. I could not think of anything more pleasant than spending my birthday with you all on such an afternoon. (*Banging on desks*)

1815 Before I propose the question, I would simply remind hon. Members of the provisions of Rule 16 in relation to those oral questions which were tabled and have not been taken today.

I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn *sine die*. Those in favour?
(**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.
This House will now adjourn *sine die*.

The House adjourned at 5.25 p.m.

1820