



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

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

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 25th June 2024

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.35 p.m.

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

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

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

Madam Speaker Ruling

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

By way of conclusion,

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

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

All right, we can proceed with questions.

55

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

60

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

65

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

Thank you very much indeed.

70

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

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

75

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

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

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

80

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, indeed.

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

Questions for Oral Answer

MINISTER FOR HEALTH, CARE AND BUSINESS

Q563/2024

Wheelchair maintenance – Teething problems resolved; and how

Clerk: Answers to Oral Questions continued.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Q564/2024

Care Agency employees – Increasing/decreasing numbers

Clerk: Question 564. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Supplementaries?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

150

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

155

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

160

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

165

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Reyes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Any other supplementaries?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Clerk: Question 565. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

250

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

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

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

Q566/2024

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

Clerk: Question 566. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

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

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

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

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

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

270

Madam Speaker: Any supplementary questions?
Next question.

Q567/2024
Mount Alvernia refurbishment –
Completion

Clerk: Question 567. The Hon. A Sanchez.

275

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

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

280

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

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

285

Madam Speaker: Next question. (*Interjection*)

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

290

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

295

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

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

300

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

305

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

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

310

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

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

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

315

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

320

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

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

325

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q568/2024
Letters before action –
Care Agency; ERS

Clerk: Question 568. The Hon. A Sanchez.

330

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

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

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

335

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

340

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

Clerk: Question 569. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

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

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

Clerk: Question 570. The Hon. A Sanchez.

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

- (1) Care Agency
- (2) ERS

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Any supplementaries?

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

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

380

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

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

385

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

390

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

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

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

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

400

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

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

405

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

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

410

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q571/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

430

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

435

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

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

440

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

445

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

450

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

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

455

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

460

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

Clerk: Question 572. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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

480

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

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

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

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

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

495

Madam Speaker: Next question.

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

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

500

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

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

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

505

EMIS Web

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

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

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

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

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

530 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q574/2024
Visiting consultant clinics –
Systems access to records

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q575/2024

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In respect to the first question as to whether it is the same thing, the qualified nurse and the enrolled nurse, unfortunately I do not have that information on me, but I can find out.

625 **Hon. E J Reyes:** I am grateful, Madam Speaker, for the honesty and information and I will be grateful whenever she can to finalise the answer through this House.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q576/2024

UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme – Applied in Gibraltar directly or inquiry held

630 **Clerk:** Question 576. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, will the UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme be applied in Gibraltar directly, or will the Government hold an Inquiry to reveal the extent of the harm caused locally?

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

640 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** I can confirm that the UK's Infected Blood Compensation Scheme *is* applicable to Gibraltar and that Gibraltar, as with other British Overseas Territories, has been included in the legislation.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q577/2024
Funding of hearing aids –
Current position

645 **Clerk:** Question 577. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Government state the current position with respect to the funding of hearing aids for those suffering from hearing impairment and associated conditions?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA provides behind-the-ear (BTE) hearing aids at no cost to the patients.

655 With patient's choice, some patients choose more discreet, smaller hearing aids, such as an in-the-ear (ITE). ITE hearing aids are subsidised, but patients contribute towards the overall cost.

Batteries are currently provided to the patients at the initial fitting of the hearing aid; however, they then purchase any subsequent batteries themselves. This is being looked into as part of the Government's Manifesto Commitments.

660 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I am aware that – I apologise, I did not indicate that I wanted to ask the supplementary!

Madam Speaker, I am aware that in 2018 the GHA provided a standard hearing aid, the cost of which was £420. And as the Hon. Minister has stated, if the patient wishes a different model then they would have to pay the difference.

665 Can the Hon. Minister comment, or does she have the information as to how much the hearing aids are now?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Unfortunately, I do not have that information on me.

670 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Also, back in 2018 –

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: I do, actually; apologies for that.

The cost of the GHA per hearing aid is £350. Most patients will receive two hearing aids, i.e. one per ear. And we see approximately 25 to 26 patients for new hearing aids fitting per month.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, in 2018, again, I am aware that patients were entitled to a new hearing aid every four years. Is that still the case?

680 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not know of any policy changes to that particular policy.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mr Reyes.

685 **Hon. E J Reyes:** Madam Speaker, I declare a vested interest as the daily user of a hearing aid. I know that in the past, reasonable repairs to the hearing aids was something that one could achieve via the system. Is that facility still available? Because I did try to report the matter in February and I am still waiting for any feedback or any indication. And my hearing aid does require some repairs. I do not know if the Minister is up to date. Or perhaps you could look into it for me?

690 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the policy is that the state-issued hearing aid is repaired by the GHA.

Hon. E J Reyes: Yes, Madam Speaker, the Minister did kindly say before that, as far as she was aware, there had not been a change of policy as that stated in 2018. But what I am saying is that the system does not seem to be working, you know.

Can the Minister enlighten us on what we sufferers of hearing aids need to do?

700 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I would suggest that he gets in touch with the relevant Department. I was not aware that there were going to be questions on the policy on the fixing of his particular hearing aid. Had I been so aware, I would have ensured that I was up to date with that information, but unfortunately I do not have that information to hand.

Hon. E J Reyes: Madam, I am not going to... but perhaps the Minister and I can meet behind the Speaker's Chair. Because, yes, I would.

705 What I am trying to prove is that –

Madam Speaker: Unless there is a question, I do not want you to repeat the statement again. Is there a new question?

710 **Hon. E J Reyes:** My question to the Minister is fully understood. I tried to contact the relevant Department in February and they were going to find out. And one is still awaiting an answer.

The question is: does the Minister know why? I think it is no, but I would like to hear it.

715 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, it is *highly* unusual that the House is entertained by questions about a particular Member's own query about his particular own interest.

I think the Minister has generously answered the question in the generic sense: are repairs to hearing aids still handled? Yes, the policy has not changed. The State-issued hearing aid is repaired by the State where it is economically viable. I assume we sometimes replace it, if it is more economically viable to replace it. But I think it is a little outside what it is that one would expect to see in this House, to see an individual's Member's query pursued through his questions.

720 Can the Minister look into why my phone call in February has not been dealt with, is not something I have in my short experience in this House, when compared to the Hon. the Father of the House ever seen deployed as a question.

725 And in any event, Madam Speaker, we always wish to be helpful to hon. Members and to any citizen who approaches us, whether across the floor of the House or otherwise. And of course we will pursue the matter after the session, but I do not think it is appropriate to continue to pursue the hon. Member's *own* query about his *own* hearing aid. And we, of course, can have a chat about that later. And the Hon. Minister and I will pursue that.

730 But we will not be able, however, Madam Speaker, to assist him with his hearing aid, because neither she nor I are particularly technically expert in respect of hearing aids.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

735 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, if I may?

I think it is really not what my hon. colleague was trying to do was to pursue any line of inquiry in relation to his particular situation. I think he was giving it as an example of things that afflict a proportion of the population, and raising questions as to the effectiveness of the policy that the Hon. Minister had indicated remains the case.

740 I think it would be helpful for those people who are in the same predicament and are hearing the answers of the hon. Members opposite – and are welcoming the fact that there is a policy to deal with these issues, and that things have not changed, but question the effectiveness of it – to know where public information on these issues can be found. Because, otherwise, if public information was out there on these matters, we would not be raising questions in the House.

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Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, I do not accept for one moment what the hon. Gentleman has said about the nature of the questions put by Mr Reyes. Luckily, we do not have to rely on recollection. We have that little thing that we sometimes refer to as *El chivatito* which is a *Hansard* that will show us exactly what it is that Mr Reyes has said. And what he has said when he has got up for the third time, is that *his* query in February was not yet replied to. And what the Minister had done on the two times that she had got up was address the question generously in exactly the same way the Leader of the Opposition has now said it was meant to have been posed – that is to say, in the generic sense.

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But look, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that Members on this side of the House receive queries from members of the public, either in our constituency work from the different districts that I have asked each Minister to look after or directly; and when something is going wrong, we very quickly tend to hear about it. It is not just *them* who receive complaints from members of the public when things start to go wrong.

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Now, if there was a problem with a number of people who have hearing aids, who are not able to get them repaired for a period of five months, I wager, Madam Speaker, that the Minister would have heard, *any* of us on this side of this House would have heard, and certainly No. 6 Convent Place would have received a number of complaints. We have not. So I do not accept for one moment that there are people in the same predicament as the hon. Gentleman – although *he* appears to have got himself into a predicament, but it is not something that he has raised with any of us since February, behind the Speaker's Chair, directly on the phone or otherwise.

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And so, Madam Speaker, we will simply refer the House to the fact that we think that we have a properly functioning system for the issue and repair of hearing aids through the GHA, through the facilities that are well known to people who require them.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q578/2024

Urgent specialist eye-care – Safeguards and protocols for time-sensitive issues

Clerk: . Question 578. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm what arrangements there are in place in respect of a service user who arrives at A&E or at the Primary Care Centre and requires urgent specialist eye care, and whether there are safeguards and protocols in place to ensure that time-sensitive issues are addressed without delay?

775

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

780 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** From both an Emergency Department and Primary Care Centre perspective, anyone presenting with conditions requiring urgent specialist eye care are referred to the Eye Clinic within hours, or directly to the on-call Ophthalmologist out-of-hours. These referral pathways ensure that safeguards and protocols are in place to ensure that time-sensitive issues are addressed without delay.

785 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, I simply ask this question because I recently received information that a particular service user had arrived at A&E and unfortunately it had not been dealt with in a time-sensitive manner. The user was informed, in fact, that a consultant was not going to come out at that time of night, I believe, around between 9 p.m. and 11 p.m.

790 And, therefore, I ask the Minister whether she is aware and whether she will address that issue?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we have an on-call ophthalmologist 24 hours a day. So indeed, if the ophthalmologist did not turn up or refused to turn up, we would be very grateful to know about that, because the on-call ophthalmologist is indeed paid to be on call 24 hours a day; and we have every reason to believe that they are there.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Simply for clarification, Madam Speaker, the information received was not that the ophthalmologist was not available, but rather that ... well, the point made by the individual was that whoever had seen her at A&E had stated: are we going to bring a consultant out at this time, rather than the ophthalmologist who is not there or not available?

I felt that it was necessary to clarify that point.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is about a needs-based assessment. If the person at A&E deemed that the ophthalmologist was to be called out the information that we are provided with is that the ophthalmologist *will* be called out. And indeed, I actually checked this out with A&E and they *do* call up the ophthalmologist on an as-needed basis. And the ophthalmologist, of course, does come when required by A&E.

810 I understand that there has been one such case in this last month that has been called out. So to our understanding, the ophthalmologist is on call 24 hours a day and does indeed go when requested by A&E. But it is indeed a judgement call on A&E's behalf as to whether the ophthalmologist is required or otherwise.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And can I ask just on that issue? So who makes that judgement call? Is that a judgement call made by a doctor on duty, or is it made by a specialist nurse who has got any training in eye conditions?

Who makes that judgement?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we rely on appropriate clinicians to make those judgement calls. So the Doctor at A&E would make that judgement call.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q579/2024
Bed shortages in St. Bernard's Hospital –
Action to alleviate

Clerk: Question 579. The Hon. J Ladislaus

825 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, has there been any bed shortages within any of the wards in St. Bernard's Hospital in the past five years; and if so what was done or is being done to alleviate the issue?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, St Bernard's Hospital has never been at 100% bed capacity in total in the last five years. There are occasions, especially during winter, when we experience bed pressures on individual wards, but we actively look to discharge medically fit patients to ensure we always have beds available.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q580/2024

Cervical screening programme – Up to date

Clerk: Question 580. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

840 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the GHA's cervical screening programme currently up to date?

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

845 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, work is ongoing to review and improve the whole cervical screening pathway. There has already been a significant investment in nurse training, improving the IT call and re-call system and developing our in-country HPV laboratory testing capability and capacity.

850 The new consultant gynaecologist who commenced employment at the GHA on 29th January this year, has a special interest in cervical screening and is working closely with our Director of Public Health to improve the programme. The GHA recognises and accepts that there have been delays in women being able to book appointments for this important screening programme and does apologise for this. Work is ongoing reviewing the whole pathway.

855 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm, if she has that information, how many people have been screened in the past 24 months?

Madam Speaker: I do not have that information, but if the hon. Member emails me, I am happy to provide that information.

Q581-3/2024

Mammograms – Regular disruption; employment of mammographer

860 **Clerk:** Question 581. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Are mammograms currently being carried out by the GHA with regularity?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 582 and 583.

Clerk: Question 582. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Thank you.

Has there been a disruption to the GHA's breast screening programme within the past five years?

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Clerk: Question 583. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a mammographer?

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

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, yes, mammograms are being performed regularly.

In the last five years we have stopped the mammography service due to COVID-19 and then again following the long-term sick absence of the breast radiologist as from 11th April 2024.

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This long-term sickness is being covered by a locum radiologist who commenced on 3rd June 2024.

The GHA currently has three full-time Radiographer Senior I Mammographers employed on indefinite contracts.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the point that between April to June the mammographer was on long-term sick leave. And it was only in June when we recruited a further specialist.

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So can the Hon. Minister confirm that between April and June, no mammograms were carried out?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, we are talking about two different things here. We are talking about screening and people presenting to the GHA with symptoms. So if in that period there was anyone that presented to the GHA with symptoms, they were promptly and appropriately referred to a tertiary institution as required.

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So all mammograms required because of an intervention, or required because a patient was presenting with symptoms, were promptly dealt with by a tertiary institution.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Can the hon. Member then confirm that no, let's say, routine mammograms were carried out within the period of those two months. So that what I am trying to get at is whether perhaps something that may have been missed out in those two months, that may then have become more of a problem?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, again, we have to distinguish between the screening programme and the patients presenting with symptoms.

So if, again, a patient presented with symptoms, they were immediately and promptly referred to a tertiary institution. However, the screening programme is there to pick up any issues. But the people that are being screened are symptomless. So it is a routine programme.

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Routine mammograms were suspended during that two-month period, but anyone that was presenting with symptoms was immediately sent to a tertiary institution.

Hon. J Ladislaus: I am grateful for the clarification. Nevertheless, what I am getting at is that my understanding from looking at the subjects, I do not propose to be obviously an expert, but is

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that the mammograms, what they pick up is something that is not yet being able to be felt by the person who, unfortunately, has the cancer or perhaps the beginning of a tumour.

So what I am getting at is if there was no screening within those two months, could there have been something missed, therefore, given that there was no screening at all?

920 That is what I am trying to get at ...

Madam Speaker: The way the hon. Member has phrased that is a hypothetical question.

The first part of the question was all right but then you went into hypothesis. (*Interjection by Hon. J Ladislaus*)

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Hon. J Ladislaus: [*Inaudible*] ...that when the person had symptoms, the screening, there was no screening within two months.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I believe from the information presented to me, we do not have all the screening results from that period just yet, but we do have full callbacks within that period.

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But thankfully all were negative. Sorry, I am just thinking that through.

Those are the results that were picked up after that period was actually completed. So after June, we have had four callbacks, but all of them were negative. We do not believe so far that there are any negative implications from a hiatus of two months.

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Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I think the question that arises, perhaps, is this one, which is that to the extent that there was an interruption to the routine screening programme between April and June 2024; and presumably, therefore, there were cancellations of appointments.

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Have those people now being given a new appointment?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, my understanding is that everyone who had a mammogram cancelled between April and June has now received their new appointment for the mammogram.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q584-5/2024

Menopause specialist –

Plans to recruit; specific clinic; talking therapies

Clerk: Question 584. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA employ a menopause specialist? If not, why? Are there any plans to recruit such a specialist?

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Is there a clinic that deals specifically with issues relating to perimenopause and menopause, both in uncomplicated and more complex cases?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 585.

Clerk: Question 585. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, are talking therapies like counselling or CBT currently offered to service-users experiencing symptoms of perimenopause and menopause?

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

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the GHA does not currently employ a BMS accredited menopause specialist but does have GPs and a Gynaecologist with special interest in this field.

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Menopause issues are seen in the well-woman clinic in the Primary Care Centre by GP with a special interest in menopause care. Complex menopause issues are referred to the Gynaecology Team in St Bernard's.

There are no plans currently to recruit a BMS-accredited menopause specialist though we are exploring training one of our team to this level and looking at how that individual would maintain the accreditation.

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Uncomplicated cases are seen in the well-woman clinic in PCC and complex cases are seen in the Gynaecology Department outpatient clinic in St Bernard's.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is offered for between six and eight sessions in Primary Care. This can be reviewed and extended if there is clinical need.

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Patients should attend their GP in the first instance and ask for a referral to be made. This referral is triaged by a group of psychologists and counsellors and a decision is made as to which of these professionals is best suited to offer therapy to the patient according to their specific needs.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, just to clarify, we do not currently have anybody who is an expert on menopause or perimenopause?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, one of the GHA Gynaecology Teams has undergone additional training in menopause care and has a special interest in the field, but has not undergone an accreditation. The issues relating to accreditation is that you need 100 patients with menopause issues in any given year to be able to maintain the accreditation; and given the size of the population, it is likely to be difficult for that accreditation to be met on an annual basis.

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Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q586/2024

New catheterisation lab – Recruitment of cardiologists

Clerk: Question 586. The Hon. J. Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA have enough cardiologists and special cardiology nurses to staff the new Catheterisation Lab, which is expected to be finalised in the last quarter of this year? If not, will cardiology specialists be recruited in order to staff the Catheterisation Lab?

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GHA currently has the following staff employed for the new Catheterisation Lab:

1 Consultant Cardiologist

1005 1 Associate Specialist
1 Physiologist substantive and 1 via locum agency

The following positions have been recently recruited:

1 Charge Nurse
1 Registered Nurse

1010 The GHA is currently in the process of re-advertising for the following posts:

1 Consultant Cardiologist
1 Radiographer SEN I
2 Radiographers SEN 2
2 Registered Nurses

1015 Which will ensure we have the appropriate trained staff for the new catheterisation facility, when the new facility is up and running.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q587/2024
New Oncology Suite –
Recruitment of specialist nurses

Clerk: Question 587. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1020 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, once the new Oncology Suite at the GHA – the plans for which were announced in February of this year – has been completed, will there be recruitment of specialist oncology nurses to staff the suite?

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

1025 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, we are advised by our clinicians that there is no need to employ new specialist oncology nurses with the opening of the new unit, as the current complement is sufficient to meet clinical needs.

1030 Current oncology service demands are audited with the focus on performance, compliance and implementation of improvements from a practice and resourcing perspective

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard from the announcement made as to the Oncology Suite that the chemotherapy area will increase from four to eight chairs, with two of those featuring private facilities and a dedicated bed for those requiring acute medical attention.

1035 There will be an increase in clinical rooms from two to four, thereby increasing capacity for one-to-one patient consultation, and there is a clear increase in resources, Madam Speaker, and the services that will be available locally to patients, which of course is very welcome.

1040 So can the Hon. Minister please confirm if they will review whether any further oncology specialists will be needed in order to staff this? Because it does seem to me like the resources are certainly increasing significantly.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am very happy to talk about the Oncology Suite all day, if the Hon. Lady wishes me to, it is one of the features that we are very proud of, because we actually want patients to be far more comfortable here in their home whilst receiving treatment. So the Oncology Suite was always driven by comfort rather than anything else.

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We are told by our clinicians that currently we do not need more staff in the Oncology Unit, so we are obviously going by what the clinicians tell us. However, the Future Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy does include the recruitment in-house, of several registered nurses.

1050 So I am very happy to say that there is a strategy in place to look to cover that need if and when it arises. But currently we are told that notwithstanding the fact that we are increasing the resources to make the patients here in Gibraltar far more comfortable, we are told that with the resources we have, it is actually adequate to cover the care of Gibraltarians in their home.

1055 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, can I just ask on that last answer the Minister gave? Because, no need to recruit more staff now, but as part of the nursing strategy, I think she said, there was a plan to recruit several registered nurses in-house. I think she used that phrase.

What does that mean? Does that mean new posts, or does it mean appoint nurses from within the existing complement?

1060 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I spoke about a Future Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy, which means that all of these questions will be reviewed as and when the need arises.

1065 The aim at the moment is to simply see how it goes as and when the Oncology Unit opens. But the oncologists at the moment, and the workforce in the GHA are already looking at the Oncology Nursing Workforce Strategy, but unfortunately they have not developed the specifics in order for me to be able to answer that question properly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q588/2024

Employment of radiologists – Complement intact over past 12 months

Clerk: Question 588. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1070 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ a Radiologist/Radiologists? If so, it is the complement of radiologists intact and has it been intact in the past 12 months?

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

1075 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, there are currently four full-time consultant radiologists in employment. Due to unforeseen circumstances, a further two consultant radiologists have been employed as locum to cover absences within the Department. These have commenced on 3rd June and 10th June respectively.

1080 The complement of consultant radiologists has now been increased to five, with a successful candidate arriving at the GHA on 8th July.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have just heard that there has been a recruitment of two further to cover long-term absences. Can the Hon. Minister confirm what these absences are due to, and whether they are medical in nature or perhaps due to burnout?

1085 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the cover required is due to sickness, which is expected to be long term and will need to be managed accordingly.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q589-90/2024

**Full or part-time employment –
Diabetologist; endocrinologist; specialist diabetes nurse**

Clerk: Question 589. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA currently employ the following on a full-time or part-time basis?

- (i) A diabetologist
- (ii) An endocrinologist
- (iii) A specialist diabetes nurse

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 590.

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Clerk: Question 590. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, have there been any disruptions to the regular functioning of the diabetes clinic at the GHA within the past five years, to include any instances where the service has lacked specialist clinicians within this area?

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

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker the GHA does not currently employ or foresees the need to employ a diabetologist.

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The GHA has the following employed on a full-time basis:

- (i) 1 Consultant Physician who is an endocrinologist
- (ii) 1 Diabetes Specialist Nurse in Paediatrics
- (iii) 2 Locum Diabetes Nurse Specialists in Adults
- (iv) 1 Registered Nurse completing the specialist training in diabetes care.

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The Diabetic service encompasses a range of services and conditions and as such there is not a single standalone diabetic clinic. The Diabetes services has never ceased delivering services to the community.

The Diabetes service has continued with dedicated specialist nurses. Furthermore, we have had general nurses with diabetes training working with the team addressing the Annual Diabetes Review Clinic, the dedicated mobile phone service and for the last two years we have, on a full-time basis, re-initiated the Diabetes Retinopathy screening service.

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Recently, there has been a two-week hiatus period between one endocrinologist and his replacement arriving, but this is within normal practice and other medical consultants were able to provide medical cover for diabetic emergencies. And, as a consequence, there has been no disruption to patient services.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, the information that I have had is that at certain points – and I do have information that service users have suffered this impact – the service did not have a specialist nurse available or indeed a doctor, at some point in recent years. I cannot pinpoint the exact dates.

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Does the Hon. Lady have knowledge of this? And what will be done in future to avoid this happening again?

1135 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have just pointed out, there was a two-week gap in the service. So we had an endocrinologist who went on sabbatical; there was a locum covering that person, that locum handed in his notice. So between that locum post being covered, there was a two-week period of absence, which is effectively the same as a consultant going on annual leave. So what happened was that other physicians and other consultants covered that two-week period.

1140 So yes, there was a hiatus in the service, but that was promptly covered. We now have a new endocrinologist on site seeing patients as is the norm.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q591/2024
Formal contracts –
Expiration; renewal

1145 **Clerk:** Question 591. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: How many GHA employees are currently working without a formal contract in place, or with a contract that has expired and not been formally renewed?

1150 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, there are no employees working at the GHA without a formal contract.

1155 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, unfortunately I am hearing of too many instances where employees are actually working with expired contracts or even with none at all for extended periods of time. This has obviously a number of impacts to the service: issues with insurance; issues with employment; issues, potentially, with continuity of care.

1160 Can the Hon. Minister confirm that everyone working within the GHA currently has an up-to-date written contract?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the information provided to me by the Director of Workforce, when these questions were submitted, was that there are no employees working at the GHA without a formal written contract in place.

1165 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q592/2024
Corporate Governance Framework –
Policy in place

Clerk: Question 592. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, can the Hon. Minister confirm whether the GHA has a Corporate Governance Framework or policy in place?

1170 **Clerk:** The Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I can confirm that the GHA has a comprehensive Corporate Governance Framework in place. Given the complexity and size of the GHA, our governance framework is multifaceted, ensuring robust oversight and effective management across all levels.

1175 Our governance structure includes the Board of Directors, the Executive Team and various Board subcommittees, each with defined roles and responsibilities to ensure accountability and transparency. Additionally, we have specialised groups such as the Review of Harm Group, which focuses on patient safety and quality of care, and uses Datix and Patient Safety Investigation analysis for incident reporting and risk management.

1180 A critical component of our governance framework is the Corporate Risk Register, which systematically identifies, assesses and monitors risks across the organisation. This register is regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that emerging risks are managed proactively. Complementing this is our Board Assurance Framework, which provides a structured approach for the Board to obtain assurance that key risks are being effectively managed and that our strategic objectives are being met.

We integrate overarching corporate policies with divisional and departmental practices through standard operating procedures. This ensures consistency in governance whilst allowing for flexibility and responsiveness to the specific needs and dynamics of different departments.

1190 Our framework also emphasises continuous improvement and compliance with regulatory requirements, guided by NHS standards and best practices. This dynamic interplay between our governance bodies and operational practices enables us to maintain high standards of clinical and corporate governance and deliver exceptional care to our patients.

1195 In summary, while there is not a single document encapsulating our entire governance framework, our system is robust, interlinked and designed to ensure effective oversight, risk management and quality assurance across all levels of the organisation. This therefore allows us to balance risk across workforce, quality, safety and finances.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, we have heard about the complexities and how it is multifaceted, yet I am aware that the NHS has such a document and the NHS is obviously far bigger than the GHA is. And those documents or that document is actually available to the public in the UK. So the public here would expect public bodies to be well-run and openly accountable.

Does the GHA therefore have any plans to collate all these multi-facets into one document that is then available to the public as and when asked for?

1205 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, if we do not, we will presently.

I am aware that there is a clinical governance organogram and as the Hon. Member will be aware, we are making as many documents as possible published on our website. So I am perfectly happy not to commit to a timeframe, but to commit that this is something that should be done.

1210 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Are the documents that the Hon. Lady mentioned in her original answer, are they currently available? One of the documents I was interested to hear about was that she says there is a Review of Harm Group, so presumably that group might have some correlation with issues of patient complaints, or something like that might review individual cases and so on.

1215 It would be interesting for people to be aware how they go about or how that works – not how they go about contacting their group, because clearly that is not necessarily desirable – but how that group functions in relation to issues such as that when they are investigating a matter which is referred through the complaints process, for example.

1220 But there may be other processes that the public, as my hon. Colleague says, quite rightly, would be interested in.

1225 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Review of Harm Group meets, I believe it is weekly to review all cases. So the way that it works is that all cases are collated through PALS – the Patient Advisory and Liaison Service – or through the Complaints Office in the Ministry are passed through there. So the staff that deals with complaints and the Ministry and the staff in PALS meet regularly with the clinical governance managers in the GHA to review each and every complaint that is made to the GHA through PALS or through the Ministry.

1230 **Madam Speaker:** Hon. Mr Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

1235 The Hon. Minister comments on the robust corporate governance and mentions the Risk Register. On the subject of the Risk Register, would the Hon. Minister be able to inform us how long the average waiting time is for the risks detailed or highlighted to be solved and successfully addressed?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, as this House may be aware, there was the first board meeting last week where I sat along with the current Chair, Prof. Ian Cumming on the board. And I can confirm that the risk register was presented to the board.

1240 Can I confirm the length of time that it takes for something to be off the risk register? No, and I need specific notice of that question.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Sacarello. I will come to the Hon. Mrs Ladislaus in a minute.

1245 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you very much for your reply.

Just for the public, would the Hon. Minister be able to confirm that this would be a priority? It has come to our notice that there is a significant delay and lapse in addressing some of these risks, and I would ask the Minister to confirm if she would give it her undue attention to ensure that this time lag is reduced?

1250 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Risk Register, as the name itself says, is something which the board of the GHA gives its utmost attention.

There is a disconnect here between the complaints made, which are addressed through the Review of Harm Group, PALS and the Complaints Office and the Risk Register. The Risk Register identifies *global* risks rather than specific issues.

1255 So the issues on the Risk Register are global issues, item by item, which need to be addressed by the GHA. And obviously this is something which the board and the executive board of the GHA takes very seriously and sits and reviews each and every time it meets.

1260 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mrs Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the subject of the Risk Register, is that document available to the public?

1265 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, that document is not a public document.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, for what reason is it not public? And will the Hon. Minister commit to making this document public?

1270 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the Hon. Lady has referred to documents that are published in the NHS. I am sure that the corporate risk register, the NHS, is not published in the NHS. This is not a document which is usually published.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q593-4/2024
Staff succession planning –
Contingency plans

1275 **Clerk:** Question 593. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, does the GHA have succession planning in place in respect of its staff?

1280 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 594.

1285 **Clerk:** Question 594. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: Does the GHA have contingency plans in place in respect of its staff?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the Gibraltar Health Authority has recently drafted a Workforce and People Strategy which acknowledges current challenges and outlines plans to address them. The GHA is now developing future plans based on projected workforce needs over the next 5, 10, 15 and 20 years.

1295 As the hon. Member will appreciate, post-COVID, the healthcare sector worldwide has been turned on its head with global shortages reported by the World Health Organisation. Gibraltar, unfortunately, is not exempt from these challenges. However, the organisation is collaborating with stakeholders to build the necessary resilience.

1300 In February this year, a team of professionals from the GHA participated at the Future Pathways Career Event hosted at Bayside and Westside secondary schools, and the GHA is currently working with the Ministry of Youth for a careers fair later this year focusing on academic and non-academic grades aimed at children who will be choosing their GCSE options, as well as those currently employed who may wish to consider a career change.

1305 Furthermore, the University of Gibraltar is operating at full capacity with nursing students in general nursing and mental health nursing. Newly qualified nurses coming into the healthcare sector will benefit from further on-the-job training to fill existing or anticipated specialised skill gaps.

1310 Madam Speaker, the GHA is undergoing a significant transformational journey thanks to the investment and support of His Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. In September, the Masters in Advanced Healthcare Practice will be laying the foundations locally to develop and train the current workforce, thereby reducing the reliance on locums.

Madam Speaker, on 18th June the Gibraltar Chronicle published what appeared to be an interview from the hon. Member. I have refrained from responding publicly out of respect for this House, given that the related parliamentary questions had already been filed.

1315 It is essential that healthcare debates rely on accurate and reasonable information. Sensationalising issues without clear understanding is counterproductive. For instance, junior doctors serve two- to three-year periods before continuing their training. This is not a revolving

door but is a stepping stone for clinicians growing and developing their careers and is common throughout jurisdictions.

1320 The GHA *does* face recruitment challenges in certain specialised areas, such as diabetes specialist nurses. In these cases, recruiting locums is necessary to ensure that these positions remain available so that local talent and services are not affected.

I have also agreed with the GHA and Unite for both parties to undertake a review of the Agenda for Change Agreement. This will allow for an infrastructure that is aligned to the NHS.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, on the subject of the revolving door can the Hon. Lady or does the Hon. Minister not accept that we do unfortunately have a revolving door of at least GPs?

1330 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, again, junior doctors, it is quite common for junior doctors to come and train for a while.

It is actually Government policy to ensure that locums are kept at a minimum and we employ people on fixed-term contracts so that we employ GPs and consultants on fixed-term contracts. This is this is a specific topic which I will be addressing in the budget debate later on in this month.

1335 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Given that all these systems have been put in place now, and I am glad to see that there are systems and that succession planning is being looked into: can the Hon. Lady accept that, unfortunately, what was done previously is now impacting upon the GHA in terms of a lack of succession planning?

1340 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Absolutely, Madam Speaker, we are still recovering from what we found in 2011.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q595/2024

Service-user waiting time – Seeing counsellor from referral date

Clerk: Question 595. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, what is the current average waiting time for a service user to see a counsellor at the GHA, from the date of referral?

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

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Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, as at the end of May 2024, the average waiting time to see a counsellor is 15 weeks. This represents an 82% decrease in the average waiting times in the last 12 months, a reduction from 86 weeks to 15 weeks in median waiting times.

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Hon. J Ladislaus: Madam Speaker, for what reason is there still a waiting time of 15 weeks? Surely individuals who need counselling, need it a lot quicker than within 15 weeks.

We did have six trainee counsellors who were available and whose contracts were unfortunately not renewed in May of this year. Can the Hon. Minister confirm whether there is a lack of resources, of human resources?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I am not aware of the six particular counsellors or the reasons why their contracts were not extended.

1365 Do we think that 50 weeks is not sufficient? We have recently been on a viewpoint programme where this issue was discussed at length. So we are in the process of reducing waiting times, trying to reduce the waiting lists which are in place. And what we are looking to do is once those waiting lists are reduced, to reduce those waiting times significantly.

But I do agree with the Hon. Lady that 15 weeks is not a good place to be.

1370 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, simply on the point that the Hon. Minister is not aware of, the six trainee counsellors, I believe that that point was addressed in the viewpoint by the Minister herself.

Perhaps she could clarify the reason why those counsellors did not continue and their contracts were unfortunately ended in May?

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Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, I believe that the Hon. Lady is referring to the trainee counsellors that provided the 100 hours of training. Those are not in a contract with the GHA. We were providing training for those counsellors and they were given those 100 hours in respect of training. So what we have committed to do – and we have actually got a meeting set up in the next couple of weeks with the trainee counsellors and the psychologists and the clinical leader of the Psychology Department at the hospital – is that we are providing a specific programme for those counsellors to undergo before the programme is resumed.

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So there is a structured programme that we are looking to put in place. And we are actually looking to re-engage with the counsellors.

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But in order to clarify my previous point, the reason that I did not address the question is because they have not been formally contracted by the GHA. It is an agreement whereby we have provided training for those counsellors, effectively.

Hon. J Ladislaus: My understanding is that those counsellors had seen 45 service users already within their time in the GHA.

1390

For what reason, therefore, could they not continue seeing those service users in the meantime while that programme was put in place?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: We are looking to improve that programme and put certain structured improvements in place. We have been advised by the clinical lead that he wants to put in place a structured programme, whereby he also provides training to these counsellors.

1395

So as I just commented, we are putting in place a structured programme with them and we are sitting with them in the next two weeks in order to try and find a workable solution to this.

1400

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q596/2024
Service user triage –
Time seeing psychologist

Clerk: Question 596. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

Hon. J Ladislaus: On average, how long does it take a Registered Mental Health Nurse employed by the GHA to triage a service user before they see a psychologist at the GHA?

1405

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, a registered mental health nurse does not triage a patient for psychology services.

1410 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister perhaps confirm who *does*, because it is simply my understanding from the actual reports carried out by the Mental Health Board that that was the case. Perhaps I have misunderstood.

1415 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the nurse refers to the Talking Therapies Team and the Talking Therapies Team then triages each and every referral that is made.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q597-99/2024

**Mental Health Annual Inspection Report –
Psychological Services and Talking Therapies professionals**

Clerk: Question 597. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1420 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, is the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department currently composed of the following professionals, as set out in the Mental Health Annual Inspection Report 2023:

- Head of Psychological Services and Talking Therapies and Clinical Psychologist - at Ocean Views. Inpatient services and Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at PCC - Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at Community Mental Health Team - Adult secondary care talking therapies
- Clinical Psychologist based at Children's Health Centre - Gibraltar Young Minds Counselling Psychologist
- Counsellor at Ocean Views and Children's Health Centre - Adult primary care talking therapies and Gibraltar Young Minds
- Counsellor, part-time, at Primary Care Centre - Adult primary and secondary care talking therapies
- One trainee Clinical Psychologist
- Six trainee Counsellors, part-time - Adult primary care talking therapies, various locations?

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

1425 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 598 and 599.

Clerk: Question 598. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

1430 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, of the 136 service users on the legacy waiting list to access the services provided by the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department, how many responded to the opt-in exercise carried out in order to deal with the waiting lists from 2019 to December 2022?

Of those that responded, how many (1) opted in; and (2) opted out?

1435

Clerk: Question 599, the Hon. J Ladislaus:

1440 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Since the introduction in 2022 of enhanced data recording on EMIS within the Psychological Services and Talking Therapies Department, what are the rates of referral to the Department been, broken down by month?

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

1445 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, the current staffing structure is slightly different since the board carried out their review. It is currently as per the below.

So the Head of Psychological Services and Talking Therapies and Clinical Psychologist – at Ocean Views – and Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies.

Clinical Psychologist is based at the Community Mental Health Team and the adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies is an Inpatient.

1450 The Counselling Psychologist is at Ocean Views and that is the Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies.

The Clinical Psychologist is based at Ocean Views, so that is Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies and Children’s Health Centre, Gibraltar Young Minds.

1455 The Clinical Psychologist is based at the Children’s Health Centre, so that is under Gibraltar Young Minds.

The Assistant Psychologist is based at the CMHT; that is Adult Secondary Care Talking Therapies and the CHC for the Gibraltar Young Minds. There are counsellors at Ocean Views and the Children’s Health Centre; so the Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies and the Gibraltar Young Minds and Maternity.

1460 There is a counsellor at the PCC and that is Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies.

There is a counsellor part time at the Primary Care Centre, again, that is Adult Primary Care Talking Therapies. And there is one trainee clinical psychologist.

A total of 49 patients responded to the opt-in exercise, carried out. The exercise only required patients to opt in.

1465 And in answer to Question 599, robust data quality was established from November 2023 onwards. These figures are as follows:

- The number of referrals in November 2023 are 47
- The number of referrals in December 2023 are 31
- January 2024 – 39
- 1470 • February 2024 – 52
- March 2024 – 40
- April 2024 – 57
- May 2024 – 36

1475 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** In the Mental Health Boards Reports, it was suggested, or the board was given information to suggest that that the complement, as I read out, would be the complement moving forward. Can the Hon. Minister clarify, therefore, why it is that at that point in time, the issue with the six trainee counsellors was not addressed, so that we would have known by that point in time – or the board would have known by that point in time – that there would be a lack of those six trainee counsellors available?

1480

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the issue with the six trainee counsellors and the 100 hours is an issue that has been taken under review by the Clinical Manager of the Psychology Services. So the Clinical Director of the Talking Therapies has made a judgement on wanting to review that service and indeed structure it slightly better.

1485 In November, I am not quite sure what was happening, I am not quite sure what was going on at the time, but today in June 2024, the clinical lead for talking therapies has made a judgement call that he wants to have a structural review on it and he wants to have a more structured programme in place. I think it is to be applauded that he is looking to improve the programme with 100 hours that are looking to be offered by the counsellors.

1490 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Can the Hon. Minister perhaps clarify – I do not know whether she has got this information. What will happen to the 45 service users that were being seen to by the trainee counsellors?

1495 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Unfortunately, I do not have that information to hand, but I assume that they will continue to be seen by the service, they will be picked up by the service. And indeed, any such improvements are simply for the best interests of the patients.

So we are looking to restructure the programme in order to ensure better service for the patients.

1500 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, a question or supplementary on Question 598.

So we have heard that there was an opt-in opt-out system. It is or has been commented on within the board's latest reports that that was an imperfect system or strategy to manage waiting lists. What will be done in future if, unfortunately, the waiting lists grow to the same levels or there are further delays? What strategy will be implemented at that point in order to address the waiting lists?

1505 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, we are looking to address the waiting lists so these issues do not arise again in the future.

1510 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, could the Hon. Minister clarify whether the people who did not opt in are being called, whether that has been followed up? Because perhaps it is the case, of course, that such a long time has elapsed that they may have sought some specialist care, private care elsewhere.

1515 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Sorry, was the question in relation to those who have opted in?

The exercise required patients to opt in, so it is assumed that those who did not opt in have either determined they do not require the service, or they have sought follow-up care elsewhere.

1520 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, perhaps the wrong assumption would be made.

So can the Hon. Minister confirm whether those people were actually followed up on, or whether there are plans to follow up on those individuals, because it could be a number of reasons why they have not responded. Perhaps they have not received the communication. There could be 101 reasons.

1525 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, indeed, there could be 101 reasons.

The exercise was an opt-in exercise, where each and every person on the list was contacted and asked to opt in. Is it a perfect system? As a Mental Health Review Board stated itself, it is an imperfect system, but it is a system that we are currently working with. So the exercise requires patients to opt in to the service.

1530 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Can I ask how people were contacted? Is this, were they actually spoken to? Or is it they have just received a letter and it is being assumed that they received it; and it is being assumed that they understood it, and it is being assumed that they have no issues?

1535 If there is more of a personal interface, I can understand how, with that system, you could reach the conclusion that it has been very clear.

Does the Minister know whether there has been any personal contact when people were given the chance to opt in?

1540 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I do not know whether people were called personally to do so. What I do know is that the service in relation to text messages, etc. has improved significantly recently, and people are communicating far better in terms of being reminded of appointments, in terms of being communicated with the GHA on a regular basis.

So I assume that they were contacted via phone, but I do not know the exact means.

1545

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Sorry, but what is the relevance of that explanation? Is there an assumption that they did not even get a letter? That they might have just got a text saying, 'You have the right to opt in'. And people do not even really understand what that means?

1550 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, as I have stated, I do not know the exact means of communication. If you want clarification on the exact means of communication, I suggest that you give me notice of the question and I will happily seek the information that you request.

1555 However, the point that I was trying to make is that we are contacting patients at the moment via text messages and the system is proving incredibly successful in terms of contacting people via text message. So even if they were contacted via text message, we are seeing significant uptake of that service by patients generally.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q600/2024

Unregistered/unlicensed interventions – Commercial activity; fines

Clerk: Question 600. The Hon. C Sacarello.

1560

Hon. C Sacarello: Could the Government please provide a breakdown of interventions where its labour inspectors, customs officers or other Government officials have questioned and/or apprehended individuals or companies conducting commercial activity in Gibraltar while not being registered or licensed locally?

1565

Please list this activity monthly, for the last six months, including a separate column for fines issued to each entity per month and another column for fines actually settled by each entity per month.

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

1570

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, in January 2024, there were zero apprehensions, two questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

1575

In February 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, zero fined issues and zero fines settled.

In March 2024, there were zero apprehensions, zero questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

In April 2024., there were zero apprehensions, six questionings, zero fines issued and zero fines settled.

1580

In May 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, zero fined issues and zero fines settled.

In June 2024, there were zero apprehensions, three questionings, three fines issued, and zero fines settled.

	Apprehensions	Questioning	Fines Issued	Fines Settled
January 2024	0	2	0	0
February 2024	0	3	0	0
March 2024	0	0	0	0
April 2024	0	6	0	0
May 2024	0	3	0	0
June 2024	0	3	3	0

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, thank you very much to the Hon. Minister for her answer.

1585 The reason behind this question is obvious, it is to do with protecting local businesses. There is an unlevel playing field being created here where businesses who are not as exposed to the high set-up costs and high running costs for businesses locally and all the rigorous requirements that they go along with it, are entitled – sorry, where other businesses are coming in and undercutting them on price?

1590 This is a problem that has been going on for years now. We understand that there are delicacies with negotiations and it has been alluded to by the Opposition.

But my question to the Hon. Minister is: does she not see that this is doing the local business community a disservice? And as Minister responsible for that portfolio, is she going to do anything about it?

1595

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Member opposite was deputy whilst himself and myself used to fight these issues in the GFSB. So we are very well aware of the issues that we used to fight shoulder to shoulder in respect to these issues.

1600 In fact, what the figures reflect is that because of these interventions ... the businesses are given a 28-day period to regularise their position. So when we look at all these questions, what has actually happened is that businesses have been questioned, they have regularised their position and therefore they have not been fined.

So what we are seeking to do is to seek to increase the level of interventions that we do on a month-by-month basis, as indeed you can see from the figures provided.

1605 So we are looking to question or to apprehend businesses and indeed to fine them, if it is necessary. We will not fine a local business and indeed it is not necessary, and they do regularise their position in a timely manner.

1610 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure if I understood what the Minister said about fining local businesses. My question was really geared towards some of the businesses coming over the border. But nonetheless, I still think that these figures are low, certainly in terms of the apprehensions, and in some months they had zero.

And also in the case of the fines being collected they are all zero. Has this been addressed? And are any of these foreign entities? In which case: how does the Minister purport to pursue those?

1615

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: As I have stated, the number of businesses questioned and the number of businesses that have regularised their position is that which is reflected in the figures. So all of the businesses which have been questioned recently have indeed regularised their position immediately, which I am pleased to say.

1620 In respect of what we are doing, in terms of other businesses, and especially businesses coming across the border, as the Hon. Member will be aware, that is a longer term plan and requires a longer term strategy. And we are indeed looking to different methods to regularise those positions.

1625 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Sorry, but in terms of the latter part, the second limb of my question, which you may not have heard, referred to – I will just repeat it – referred to in terms of the collection of the fines if they are a foreign entity. How does the Government purport to go about collecting those fines if indeed they have no jurisdiction in or across the border?

It is not hypothetical ...

1630

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Madam Speaker, that sounds to us like a hypothetical question.

Hon. C Sacarello: It is easily resolved. How is it done currently?

1635

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, we do not appear to have a situation where we have not been able to enforce a fine against a foreign entity. But I am not going to give the hon. Gentleman legal advice.

1640 If a debt is owned by an entity outside of Gibraltar, there are provisions for service outside the jurisdiction. There is provision for enforcement outside of the jurisdiction, etc., etc.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

**Q601/2024
Port Launch –
Operational**

Clerk: Question 601, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Port Launch operational?

1645

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

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, the GTA Port Launch 'Mons Calpe' is currently operational.

1650

Hon. D J Bossino: As the Minister says, currently, is there any point in time when it was not operational in the recent history?

1655 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, I will do the Hon. Member's homework for him. We actually have two Port Launches and there is one of which is not operational. So we have a Port Launch which is called the *General Elliott*, which is not operational, and that continues to not be operational.

1660 We are looking to see whether, in fact, the reinstatement value or the fixing value of the launch is such that it would cost us too much to fix that launch. So we need to either buy a new one or enter into a higher purchase agreement with a company. So we are exploring those options.

The smaller launch was non-operational for a period of time but is now currently operational.

1665 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Is it the case that there was a period of time when the port did not have an operational launch available to it? Is that a reasonable conclusion that one can surmise from the answer that she has given?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: That is correct, Madam Speaker.

And I am informed that is the situation that we inherited in 2011 – much, though, that I hate to hark back to 2011.

1670

Hon. D J Bossino: Hon. Minister ought to hate to harp back to something that happened 12 years ago. And she is praying in aid, something, a state of affairs that was the case 12 years ago. But be that as it may. And then they say that we get riled on this side of the house, for goodness sakes, when we get treated to those type of answers.

1675

Can she give us information as to what the cost analysis is? Does she have that information available? In other words, what will it cost them to fix the laundry? I cannot remember the name of the launch. *(Interjection)*

The what?

1680

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): The *General Elliott*.

Hon. D J Bossino: The *General Elliott*. How much will it cost? And how much will the replacement cost be?

1685

Hon. Chief Minister: Madam Speaker, I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman is getting railed. *(Interjection)* Or riled. He told me across the floor of the house that what the GSD had left us was a golden legacy. *(Laughter)* So when the Hon. Lady refers him to what we inherited in 2011, I would have thought that what his ears would hear was a reference to the golden legacy, and no reason to get riled.

1690

In any event, what I heard from the Hon. Lady myself, when she was answering him, was that we were awaiting a quotation of the cost if what repairing the *General Elliott* would be. So if we are awaiting a quotation we cannot answer his supplementary.

1695

Hon. D J Bossino: I asked two questions. One had to do with the cost of repair. Is that the quote that she is waiting for? And the other question related to the cost of replacement.

Does she have that information available to her now, which she can share across the floor of the House. And I will ignore the more barbed political statements, which is the want of the Chief Minister as usual in these occasions.

1700

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, he can ignore me as often as he likes. But the hon. Gentleman is fixed with the things that he has said. I have never considered it barbed to be referred to the legacy that they left us. I will have a lot to say about it during the course of the budget debate.

But the specific answer to both of his specific questions is in the negative.

1705

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q602/2024

Preparation of Development Plan – Work commencing

Clerk: Question 602. The Hon. D J Bossino.

1710

Hon. D J Bossino: When will work commence for the preparation of the Development Plan?

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

1715 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, work on the development plan is expected to start within the next couple of months.

Hon. D J Bossino: So is it the – and I am drawing from the public statements that have been made in relation to this – is it the expectation that the plan will, after that two-month period, then be ready within a period, I think it was of two years.

1720 Is that understanding correct? So, in effect, what we are looking at is a time period from now to when the plan is ready and available of about 14 months. Is that correct?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, it is not 14 months.

1725 So, as the hon. Member is aware, because of his profession, it takes a while for these contracts to be negotiated. So we are currently in the throes of negotiating a contract with the party who the tender has been awarded to, which we estimate will take between one and a half and two months, and then, yes, then it will take a period of two years roughly to have a development plan.

1730 **Hon. D J Bossino:** So she is absolutely right in correcting me on the mathematics, which was terrible actually.

1735 But can I ask this? What type of local involvement will there be in the collation of evidence and that type of thing? Is she able to answer questions at that point? What type of interventions will there be? Because that is one of the points that I made when I reacted to that, as you will know, as she read the press release, that there ought to be local involvement, clearly, to inform the company, which I understand is an outside company, which is the company that has won the tender.

What type of local involvement will there be, and stakeholder – I do not like the use of that word, but I cannot think of another one in the process.

1740 **Hon. G Arias-Vasquez:** Madam Speaker, obviously part of the two-year period is to involve local stakeholders in the process. So of course all local entities will be involved and of course all relevant local entities will form part of the process.

1745 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And when the Hon. Lady refers to ‘relevant local entities’ is she able to list those? What is it that she is envisaging in that respect as far as that particular aspect of the process is concerned?

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Part of the contract will list those entities, but unfortunately I do not have sight of the specifics of the contract at this point in time.

1750 There will be a list of people that we expect them to engage with.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q603-5/2024

Minister Chairing Gibraltar Health Authority – Work commencing; frequency of meetings

1755 **Clerk:** Question 603. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Minister intending to chair the Gibraltar Health Authority or the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority?

1760 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 604 and 605.

1765 **Clerk:** Question 604. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How often has the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority met in the last three financial years – 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24?

1770 **Clerk:** Question 605. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: How often has the Gibraltar Health Authority met in the last three financial years 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24?

1775 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Business.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, the Minister, myself, is intending to chair the Gibraltar Health Authority and *not* the Management Board of the Gibraltar Health Authority. The Management Board sits as the GHA executive team, which the Director General chairs. Since the appointment in January 22nd of the previous Director General this meeting has occurred weekly.

The GHA board has met as follows: financial year 2021-22, due to COVID-19, no board meetings were held; financial year 2022-23, it met on five occasions; and financial year 2023-24 it has met on five occasions.

1785 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see, thank you. And that clarifies it. So I have very few supplementaries. It is just the purpose of the questions was the interchange of nomenclature that we have had a previous exchange about in the House. But that is now clear what is meant by that.

1790 Can I just ask specifically about the GHA itself, which I think the Hon. lady calls ‘the board’, but the GHA, if I may, just keep to the statutory description of it, which did not meet at all in 2021-22, she says. Can I ask why that was?

I know she said, because of COVID, but did that include ... were there no electronic Zoom meetings or anything like that of the GHA in that financial year, which really is not the financial year where the worst bits of COVID happened? The Unlock the Rock document was issued in May 2020. So by 2021-22 the worst effects were over; a vaccination programme had started.

1795 So why were there not electronic meetings if that is not provided for there? Or perhaps the electronic meetings were happening, but she means physical. So I just ask.

Hon. G Arias-Vasquez: Madam Speaker, unfortunately, that predates my time, so I would only be able to surmise why there were no meetings during that period.

1800 I am perfectly happy to ask my predecessor as to the reasons why there were no board meetings, and get back to - (*Interjection*)

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): I can recall, Madam Speaker, that although we unlocked the Rock, the GHA continued to, in effect, be in a very difficult situation for a considerable period of time.

1810 Unlock the Rock was a document that dealt with the end of the social lockdown, which unfortunately subsequently came back. We had to lockdown again. So you Unlock the Rock to an extent now seems like us thinking that we had got through COVID, when in fact it was only the beginning. It was not even the beginning of the end.

1815 So the GHA in effect continued to be working towards a COVID situation for at least another year and a half. And at that time the GHA was not thinking about board meetings, it was thinking about continuing to do what it needed to do to save lives, not just in the context of COVID, but to continue to be able to save lives of those who had cancer treatment that had been delayed; those that needed to have their screening, etc.

1820 And I recall very vividly indeed the difficulties that the GHA was having at the time, which were not at all even starting to be resolved in May or June of 2020. Just to put this in context, the first reports of COVID in January-February 2020 happened. Then we had March when we saw the first cases of COVID in Gibraltar and the beginning of the lockdown. And April-May, when we started to see the worst of the lockdown. Then in May, we started to think that we could release the lockdown.

1825 But the GHA continued to be unable to establish normal operations for at least a year and a half after that. I was not the Minister for Health at the time, but I worked very closely with her. She worked every hour that God sent. She was also Minister for Justice and had responsibility for the legislation that we were passing at the time.

1830 And I recall that all of that reality is the ones that we had to remind ourselves to understand why they were not having board meetings. Indeed, I recall one of the things that we did was that we stopped the operation of the law that required any corporation to have a board meeting. So we actually gave a bye to companies and to associations that had to have by their bylaws, annual meetings. We actually gave them a bye to say they did not have to have the board meetings. So that was what we were doing in the economy generally, let alone in the GHA.

1835 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** But if I may, Madam Speaker, that is precisely why I thought and I wanted to query this particular aspect, because certainly my experience of the GHA, this is a policy-making board. So a policy-making entity, which certainly in my time I used to Chair and would be dealing with the important issues of the day precisely for the explanation given by the Chief Minister.

1840 I would have thought that meetings were being held, albeit on an electronic basis. And certainly in the financial year we are talking about, because a lot of what the Chief Minister has just explained occurred in the previous financial year, if I may, and not in 2021-22, which is a bit further on. Well beyond some of that, after the vaccination programme had started and after, thankfully, the worst part of COVID.

1845 So if the Hon. Minister, can I ask the Hon. Minister to yes, ask her predecessor or her officials in relation to that, because it may simply be that they were discussing these things electronically, and that would be sufficient just in terms of information on this side of the House.

1850 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Madam Speaker, the hon. Gentleman will excuse me from speaking from memory, and *Hansard* will forgive me if I therefore confuse the numbers. But there seems in my mind there was no such thing as that financial year because we went from financial year 2019-20 not to financial year 21-22 or 2021. We went to a double financial year, a 24-month financial year, 2019-21, and then 2021-22 was the first financial year after the 24-month year, which is a misnomer, which we understand because we explained in detail in this House. And the GHA was still dealing with the civil contingency that was COVID, even at that time.

1855 And in the first financial year after COVID 2021-22, we still had the COVID line in the book because we were still incurring the COVID expenditure. And I think the GHA was still with the civil contingency declared and with a gold command structure. That is from memory.

1860 So, Madam Speaker, I think that is obviously what happened. And it is a matter of public record that that happened. I think it is a little ungenerous to ask the Minister to go back to look at the public record of what was happening at the time – and it may even be outside the rules of the House and the context of what it is that we can be asked about – because if it is public, then the hon. Gentleman can go to the archive and read the Chronicle for the year and see why it was that we were not doing those things.

1865 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** To clarify, I am not asking about anything that is in the public domain. What I was just asking the Minister to do is what I *think* she had offered towards the tail end of her answer, which I repeat, as a question.

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Madam Speaker, what I think I have clarified is that we think it is all public, and therefore I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave a few moments ago.

1870 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q606/2024

**Minister Chairing Gibraltar Health Authority –
Work commencing; frequency of meetings**

Clerk: Question 606. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

1875 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, will the Gibraltar Health Authority adopt the saliva/spit test that predicts genetic risk to prostate cancer, once commercially available, and roll this out in Gibraltar as part of a screening programme.

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

1880 **Minister for Health, Care and Business (Hon. G Arias-Vasquez):** Madam Speaker, the saliva test referred to in the question is currently still undergoing clinical trials. The initial results indicate that this is a promising development that provides a more accurate test than the PSA blood test. The GHA *will* continue to monitor the outcomes of this research and consider this in future for using it in Gibraltar.

1885 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

1890 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am conscious that some of us do not have the luxury of being able to pop in and out of the Chamber, and I wonder whether, therefore, it might be a convenient moment to recess for 15 minutes and come back at five past six?

Madam Speaker: All right. We will recess for 15 minutes and return at 6.05.

The House recessed at 5.50 p.m. and resumed at 6.05 p.m.

Addressing Hon. Members

1895 **Madam Speaker:** Before we begin, I have been loath to interrupt individual Members as they have been speaking, but may I remind all Members on both sides that you/he/she ought to be avoided. We ought to address each other by 'the Hon. Member'. I have been benevolent before the break, but I have had a coffee, so I might not be so benevolent going forward.

INWARD INVESTMENT AND THE SAVINGS BANK

Q551-554/2024

General sinking fund –

Balances; cash reserves @ 1st May 2024

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

Question 551. The Hon. R M Clinton.

1900

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

1905

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question with Questions 552 to 554.

1910

Clerk: Question 552 the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund on the following dates, being 1st May 2024.

1915

Clerk: Question 553. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government please advise why the General Sinking Fund decreased by £10 million from £28.3 million as at 1st March 2024, to £18.3 million as at 1st April 2024.

1920

Clerk: Question 554. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Can the Government explain how it is that reported cash reserves since 2021 temporarily increased significantly at March financial year end, only to fall back again in April?

1925

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

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, the figures for 1st May 2024 are:

1930

- Gross public debt £872.7 million
- Aggregate debt £854.3 million
- Cash reserves £137.5 million
- Net debt £716.8 million

The balance on the Sinking Fund at the requested date is the same as on the previous date already provided.

The decrease of £10 million was as a result of the payment of interest on Government debt.

1935

The figure provided at the end of March each year is the Forecast Outturn calculated by the Treasury, which is usually quite close to the actual figure, which is the accurate figure.

The figures provided during the year are estimates which change from day to day. These cannot be relied as indicators and have never been published previously, given that this monthly information has been provided to the hon. Member Opposite since he started asking for it in the estimates in 2018.

1940

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answers.

1945 Can I ask the Minister in relation to his answer to Question 553? He said that the £10 million the decrease in the General Sinking Fund was because £10 million was used for the payment of interest on Government debt. May I ask the Minister why that was not put through the Consolidated Fund?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, because the General Sinking Fund, which we created now and in the previous time we were in Government and which they did away with, provides that the money that is put into the Sinking Fund – which is usually money from the sale of assets or
1950 Contributions from the Consolidated Fund – once they are in there, they can be used for either the repayment of debt or the payment of interest.

And therefore, in looking at the financial situation this year, a decision was taken to use a part of that money for the payment of interest.

1955 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer to that.

If I can move on to question 554. I hear what the Minister said that during the years and the monthly numbers that I am given in this House may be estimates, but does the Minister have any sense of ... because I get estimates even for those months, sometimes. And to jump up significantly if, if I can give an example in March 2021 from £59 million to £119 million, in April 2021 from
1960 March 2022 from £37 million to £119 million in April 2022.

Is the Minister not slightly concerned that ... and it only happens at year end because then it goes down again. For example, in May 2022, it drops from £119 to £22 million. In April 2021, it was £119 million. And then in May it was £35 million. It always seems to peak at financial year ends.

1965 I am just wondering if the Minister has asked or inquired of the Financial Secretary whether there is anything that is done at financial year ends, some kind of journal entry or some other exercise that is done, which is not reflected during the year, or is done specifically at year end, and that changes the cash reserves so significantly.

1970 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I am not concerned because these figures are not produced for my benefit, they are produced for his benefit. And they have never been produced before he wanted to see them.

But I think I need to remind the Member that if he actually looks at the report that is produced when we have the audited accounts, the Principal Auditor's, there is a page that shows the
1975 movement of cash in a year and that at the moment is around in excess of £6 billion. So the Government's cash movement in and out is £6 billion. And there can be days with big movements and days with low movements.

So if the Hon. Member were to ask for the figures on any other day of the month, he would probably get big movements in and out. It is possible that when the close of the year is starting in
1980 March, that more pressure may be put for payments to Government that are due, in order to close the financial year and that that pressure is not there after 1st April. But, you know, this is just guesswork on my part.

I do not attach any particular significance because at the end of the day, we work on a cash basis on a 12-year cycle. And really, the only accurate figure we have is a figure that is subjected
1985 to audit and that happens on the last day of the year. Everything else in between are estimates.

Hon. R M Clinton: Madam Speaker, I understand what the Minister is saying, but it just seems peculiar that it is always at the financial year end.

1990 He is speculating as he says, well, it may be that we asked debts to be paid. I can speculate as well and say, well, maybe we are not paying creditors. But in the financial world – and I hesitate to use this word, that is called window dressing, where you are improving the cash figure at your financial year end.

1995 I would just ask the Minister, if he can, to ensure that this is not a practice that we have fallen into, in effectively ensuring that the cash figure at the end of the financial year is somehow flattered.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Employ a financial secretary to flatter anything for him or for anybody else. And I can tell him, certainly, and I do not assume that he thinks that I have anything to do with deciding what the figures should be.

2000 If the Hon. Member is shrugging his shoulders, then I have to tell him I *resent* that he should doubt whether I have something to do with it. Okay. So I want to make it clear that the figures that are provided, are provided by the people who work for the Government of Gibraltar, not for the gilded politicians that happen to be in Government at any time, and that they are professionals. And that therefore, it is simple arithmetic. If you have got two dates and the figure
2005 at the beginning of the month is higher than at the lower of the month, then simple arithmetic tells you without having to ask an explanation from me, that in that month, when the figure is down, more money has gone down than has come in.

So the Hon. Member apparently is not concerned about the fact that it goes down. He is concerned about the fact that it did not go down earlier, because that is what his flattery of the end of the year implies. So he is asking me why it went down in May when really what he wants to ask me is: why was it higher in April?

Well, look, it was higher in April because probably every April the civil servants look at the money that the Government is owed and press people to pay the Government the money that they pay. It is only an assumption on my part, but they are an assumption that I would expect
2015 diligent civil servants to engage in doing. And if he thinks that is window dressing, well, unfortunately, I am not able to demonstrate if it was being done if the GSD was there, because nobody when the GSD was there from that side of the House asked for these figures.

So the figures only exist when he started asking for them and if they were concerned to window dress it, then we would have window dressed it so that they would not be able to ask me the
2020 question.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q555/2024
Rooke site residential home –
Expectation to complete

Clerk: Question 555. The Hon. D J Bossino.

2025 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I hope the Minister is not in a bad mood now after this.

Can I ask him now after this question, Question 555 says: when is the residential home Rooke site project currently expected to complete?

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

2030

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): Their position continues to be as previously stated in February this year.

2035 **Hon. D J Bossino:** And just to clarify the answer, then, was that the project is likely to be completed by the end of this calendar year. So it is 2024. And is he still confident that that is going to be the case, that they will not be the subject of further delays? This is a project which is already

delayed as it is and he has explained why that is the case and in the previous session to which he has referred, are by a year.

2040 So how confident is he that that nothing will be an obstacle to achieve the date that he has referred to, or the period of time that he has referred to?

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Well, Mr Speaker, I am not in charge of running the project, so I am not confident or unconfident. I have just relayed the information to him that was relayed to me.

2045 I assume that the people who are involved in doing the home were confident that when they told me that it would be finished this year. So I am not in a position to be confident or not confident.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, the Member was very confident when he first announced the project.

2050 I remember him being interviewed, I think, on site at the time and he was extolling the virtues of this new modern construction method, which is the modular construction method that he was importing from China, and that it would be ready in June 2023.

He was the one, personally, on behalf of the Government, that was confident that this is something for the future. So I am surprised by the hon. Member's answer. But be that as it may, may I ask him who is responsible and who is providing him?

2055 So who is responsible for the timings of the project and the same entity, the same individuals must be the same entity individuals who are providing him with information as to completion times. Who are they? Who? I suppose the owners that he has referred to in asked to in the House in the past.

2060 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, there is a long list in the history of Gibraltar under every Government of things that have not been delivered on the date that they were expected to deliver. But in this case, this is not a Government-owned building that is being built. In the other cases, when the GSD was there, they were making projections and were confident about the buildings that were being paid by the taxpayer. And then things did not happen.

2065 There were buildings which for homes which they were very confident was going to be delivered by a particular contractor.

2070 And then the contractor disappeared over the hills, leaving a lot of debts to a lot of subcontractors in Gibraltar. And the Government had to come in and ask JBS to finish the job. That does not mean that the person who was at that point in time, a Member of the Government was responsible, because it was not running the building sites. It was simply giving Parliament answers based on information that he received.

2075 And therefore, I conveyed the confidence that there was at the beginning of the project, because at the beginning of the project, nobody anticipated problems that arose at a later stage in the project, which happens with every project that develops problems subsequent to the beginning.

The modular part was delivered on time and on cost. The only problems have been the parts that were not modular that have relied on local suppliers. That is all I can tell you.

2080 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Member has not answered the question, which is as to ownership, who currently owns this building and which is the entity that is providing him with that information? He gives us a history lesson of things which he says we did wrong, but they are different. They say they are much better than us. And he was very confident that this was going to be a huge success. And that is what he sold to the people of Gibraltar. And at this point –

2085 **Madam Speaker:** I am hesitant to interrupt the Hon. Member and please correct me if I am wrong, but my recollection was that the question on ownership of the Rooke was disallowed on the basis that it had been asked at a previous meeting within the six-month period. (*Interjection*)

I cannot, either, but I am almost certain.

Hon. D J Bossino: But I genuinely cannot recall –

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Madam Speaker: But if I am wrong then you can clearly ask that question at the next session, but I am almost certain it was it was one of the questions that was disallowed.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, it may have been, you are right that there may have been, I think on the back of the answer as filed by the Hon. Member, I think I filed and then that may have been disallowed. So I will not pursue that point.

2100

So I have dealt with the history and it is what it is. And I cannot pursue the issue as to who owns this site, but the Hon. Member at the time said that in February, which he referred to, he said the completion dates will be sometime this year. And then he said that the Government will take a decision on how it will access or use the facilities.

Is that option still available to the Government? And within that, is he also intending for the site to be used as a residential home and for the site to be occupied by those who currently reside at Mount Alvernia?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, I share the view of the GSD Government that we will announce things when we decide it is necessary to announce them, and not when the Opposition wants us to announce it.

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So therefore, that is what I learned in opposition from the previous Government and I took the lesson to heart, and I think that is a good policy to follow. So the answer is we will announce what we will do when we decide what we are doing.

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Hon. D J Bossino: But the question was very specific, that he may decide to announce it whenever he wishes to do so, but he already responded in February that the Government would take a decision on how it will access and use the facilities. Is that still within the realms of possibilities as far as the decision-making process is concerned? Is it something that he is considering using as a facility once it is completed?

He may announce it whenever he wishes to, but he has already said that there will be a question of access and use of the facilities, whatever that means.

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, this has not changed from what I told him the last time.

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Hon. D J Bossino: He was much more helpful in February when he was providing answers as to the delays, but that is the way that the hon. Member operates and answers questions. And he gave a list of things which had happened which were the cause of delays.

And he mentioned, as he may recall, that the source of the delays in respect of this project were in relation to the non-modular parts. In other words, the modular aspect of it was fine being brought from China, fitted out, and it was the non-modular aspects which had been the cause of the delay.

2130

Can I ask him very specifically whether there is one of the issues which is causing a delay to the completion of this project is the fact well, I say the fact, it is the information that we have that there has not been a fire safety certification in relation to this.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: No knowledge of what he is talking about, Madam Speaker.

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Hon. D J Bossino: May I ask the Hon. Member to enquire whether that is the reason for the delay? Because quite frankly, we on this side of the House is the information that we have, and we think that it is an issue of very serious concern.

2140

May I also ask him this? Is it also the case that the door size of the modules, the containers which have formed parts of this project are not big enough to allow for wheelchair access, and that that is another reason why this project is being delayed.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: We will ask to see whether what the Hon. Member is saying has any truth for it, and I have nothing more to add, however many more supplementaries he wants to put.

2145 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Madam Speaker, this is almost akin to if he does not like the answer, he can lump it, to which I was treated in the last Parliament. And again, typical, with the greatest of respect to him, of the hon. Member opposite.

But can I ask him this? Does he still think that this project was worthwhile and a wise investment and a success? Or is he now starting to at least consider whether it is a complete and utter failure and a waste of money?

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Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, if the Hon. Member wants to know why I react the way that I react is because when, in good faith, I assume that he wants information in order to be better informed about what is happening. I give him more information and I seek the information for him until he shows his true colours and shows that he is not remotely interested in anything other than in an ability to attack me, presumably because he thinks it gets him more votes.

2155

And since I am not interested in getting him more votes in order to replace the Hon. Mr Azopardi, I am not going to do anything that is going to be in his favour, and I am not going to give him any more opportunities to put on a show here which he thinks helps him to get where he wants to be.

2160

Madam Speaker: Is there another supplementary as opposed to a comment?

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, there absolutely is and I am aware of the rules, and there is a supplementary. It is interesting to see that the Hon. the Minister is now Mr Azopardi's biggest fan, it seems, and wishing to protect his position based on a fallacy, let me tell him, based on a false premise. And I do not need to seek –

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Madam Speaker: The question is?

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Hon. D J Bossino: I need to just make this point, if I may, I do not –

Madam Speaker: You may not. Put the question, (*Interjections*) we are on seven supplementaries –

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Hon. D J Bossino: I do not need to seek extra votes.

Madam Speaker: Put the question or I will ask the hon. Member to sit down.

Hon. D J Bossino: Madam Speaker, I have thrown the pen. Can I ask –?

2180

Madam Speaker: That was accidental, I am going to presume. (*Interjection*)

Hon. D J Bossino: It is a pity because that was a good point.

Can the hon. Member state whether there has been any advance in relation to the contractual arrangements – which he has said in this House in the past – he intends to get involved in as far as the operation. One thing is the ownership, this is the operation and the management of the residential home is concerned – assuming it is still going to be a residential home because the hon. Member has unanswered questions in relation to that. This is operation –

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Madam Speaker: And my recollection was that the question that was disallowed was on management ownership. Well, I might be wrong, but I do not think so. It was quite a lengthy question, and to my recollection it touched on ownership, management and something else.

2190

If the hon. Member disagrees with me, I am very happy for you to persuade me otherwise.
(*Interjection*) So would I, but I am almost certain it was disallowed.

2195

Madam Speaker: All right, we are going to move on.
Next question.

Q556-60/2024

Road to the Lines –

Upgrade; company; purpose; costs; timeline; responsibility

Clerk: Question 556. The Hon. D J Bossino.

2200

Madam Speaker: If I am wrong, I will allow the Hon. Member to put that question next time.

Hon. D J Bossino: Yes, I am very grateful, Madam Speaker.

So, what plans does the Government have to upgrade the infrastructure to Road to the Lines?
(*Interjection*)

2205

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

Minister for Inward Investment and the Gibraltar Savings Bank (Hon. Sir J J Bossano): I will answer this question with Questions 557 to 560.

2210

Clerk: Question 557/2024, the Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: I have a spare pen!

Which company is carrying out works at Road to the Lines?

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Clerk: Question 558. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What is the purpose behind the works being currently carried out at Road to the Lines?

2220

Clerk: Question 559. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: What are the envisaged costs and what is the timeline to upgrade the infrastructure at Road to the Lines?

2225

Clerk: Question 560. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Who is going to be responsible for the costs of the upgrade of the infrastructure at Road to the Lines?

2230

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

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Madam Speaker, there are no works being carried out on Road to the Lines. The area is being cleared to assess its potential and no decision has been taken at this stage on the infrastructure.

2235

Hon. D J Bossino: 556 ... I think we need to make a reference to the questions.

2240 When I talked about the plans, why is it the case that we have gone from a project which seemed to be much more sophisticated than the one that we understand is currently happening – which is a clearing of the site, when it was under the auspices of the Deputy Chief Minister, in respect of which I asked him questions at the last House.

2245 He had there an expression of interest, and an individual had been identified to carry out the projects at Road to the Lines, then to the projects going to the Hon. the Minister for Housing. When I asked the question at the last session to now, the matter being handled by the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development.

What is it that they are now planning to do? Because it is all very confusing. It has gone from private investor to rent and repair, to now the Hon. Mr Bossano doing something in respect of which he has provided very little by way of answer.

2250 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Well, Madam Speaker, I do not think I can help the hon. Member if he is easily confused. That is the problem, maybe, that some other speciality might help him with, but not me.

2255 The fact that the project that the Deputy Chief Minister referred to before has not proceeded, is because there have been more than one occasion when it has gone out to expression of interest and people have come up and offered money for the site, and then when they have actually started doing numbers they have not continued. They have backed out, because it is a difficult site to work, according to the people that have been there before. And therefore, when people are expecting to make a lot of money and they start finding complexity and a difficulty of access and difficulty of the infrastructure and so on, they just do not do it.

2260 So there is not a sinister move, although it is quite obvious that in his mind he sees sinister moves in anything. But it has got quite a simple explanation. It came back to the Government, and not for the first time, it has happened more than once. And therefore, until we are sure that we can do something that is consistent with what we want to do in terms of getting the best use for that site, the answers that he can get are very little because we have not yet reached a decision stage.

2265 So, at the moment, we have got somebody that is clearing the site. There are possible things that we can do on that site in housing for local people and we cannot say more than that until we are sure that we are going to be doing it, because of course if we say anything more than that and we find that it does not happen afterwards, then the Hon. Member will want to punish us for having told him something that was not written in the Bible and was bound to happen.

2270 And I do not want to put him in that situation in the future.

Hon. D J Bossino: I am grateful to the Hon. Member for not putting me in that position.

2275 But he does not need to take these things personally. I am not attacking him. I am not trying to find sinister motives. I am simply asking questions because the hon. Member does not provide very full answers. He does not provide very full answers and I have given him a brief abridged history of what is going on on this particular site!

2280 And from our point of view, he must understand that we are seeing a Government which is in disarray and unable to come to a decision as far as this site is concerned. It is an absolute and utter mess, as far as we can see on this side of the House, which is not being assuaged by the answers that the Hon. the Minister is providing.

2285 But the hon. Member, the Hon. the Minister, has not answered a few questions, which I think he is in a position to answer. He says that 'somebody' is carrying out ... I called it the works. He said no works. They are just clearing out. I consider that 'the works' is a generic term which can include a clearing out. Who is this somebody? Which company is carrying out these works?

I it is a company, and I imagine it is a company, has that not gone out to tender?

2290 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** I know that saying we are all in disarray is not attacking us. I accept that, you know! (*Laughter*) But now that we have to know what the terminology is, so as to know when he is being nice to us, so that we can recognise it when we see it.

I cannot give him the name of the person, I do not have it, of the worker. But it is a small company employing local people. And what they are doing at the moment is clearing the site, that is to say, and doing investigations to see if something that might happen – which I am not going to tell him what it is, because it might not happen, and I do not want him to go through these emotional struggles that he has of being totally confident that he can take every word that I am telling him, as written in tablets of stone, and then he finds that I can't deliver.

2295 I do not want to keep on disappointing the hon. Member at this point in his career. So I will find out who it is and I will communicate the name, and when they are in a position to provide the information as to whether we can proceed in the line, that I would hope we would be able to proceed, and I can do it with the confidence that it is going to happen and will not be delayed, and I will not have to see him disappointed by the delays, then I will communicate a more in-depth picture.

2300 **Hon. D J Bossino:** I am entitled to attack *them*!

2305 What I told the hon. Member is that I was not attacking *him* personally, which is what he accused me of in one of his responses. We are entitled, this is what we are here to do, to ask questions and also attack them, if we think that what they are doing is wrong. This is the nature of the politics that we have in this place, and indeed I think in the entirety of most democracy, if not all the democracies.

2310 But he has not. There are many questions which remain unanswered, which I think the hon. Member can answer. Why is it, he says he is going to provide me with the information in relation to which entity is carrying out the 'clearing up', as he puts it. Why is it that he has ...

2315 Well, can he state whether the contract has been given to this entity as a result of a tender process? Yes or no? I am not attacking him personally. He can relax and I am very relaxed about it –

Madam Speaker: Before the question is answered, I would just say that I did not want to interrupt the hon. Member, but in my view the purpose of the Opposition should be to hold the Government to account and not to attack.

2320 But that is a separate conversation we can have some other time and it might dissipate any answers on this side which need not be taken on that issue. So let's answer ...

2325 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Madam Speaker, I am very grateful that you have made that point, because before we can continue with Question Time, I think it is incumbent on me as Leader of the House to try and clarify, in particular for those who may be listening and who are watching our politics, to say that we on this side of the House do not believe that we are here to attack each other.

2330 We believe, Madam Speaker, that a Government has been elected to govern, that is to do. And an opposition has been elected to hold us to account in that respect. We do not believe that we have a system of Government and Opposition where we should expect to be attacked, as the hon. Gentleman has set out. And I think it is very important that we set this out at this stage, and I shall have a lot more, unfortunately, now, in particular, given what the hon. Gentleman has said, to say about this during the course of this session.

2335 But we have an adversarial system of Government and Opposition. That does *not* mean and has never meant that we have a system of Government and Opposition where the Opposition attacks the Government. We have a system where the Opposition attacks the ideas that the Government may put in analysing them and in working out whether they are the best ideas for our people.

But the idea that the hon. Gentleman has given flight to, I think is *very* negative, but *hugely* descriptive of how he and others on his side do politics. And therefore. Madam Speaker, although

2340 I want everybody watching and listening to know that it will not be our style to attack Hon. Members Opposite, but to challenge their ideas also, and to accept that they should hold us to account.

I thank him for having slipped off the mask for long enough that he has explained to the public what their approach to politics is, in glorious technicolour.

2345

Madam Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: I am not sure on what basis the hon. Member just rose. Because he said before we continue with Question Time. So I am rising on the same basis, almost as if this was a *quasi* point of order to make an intervention, an opportunity to make a speech. May I say, Madam Speaker, on a reversal and turning the reality on its head of what normally happens, because what normally happens – and it beggars belief to hear what the Hon. Member has just said.

2350 Some of those words should have got stuck in his throat because the description that he has given about political parties going on the attack with negativity is what he does all the time in this House, (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) to every single Member on this side of the House. And we will see it, no doubt in glorious technicolour, as we do every year, especially when he does his budget reply. (*Interjection*)

2355 And it is an easy forecast because we get it every year that when he gets to the budget reply, he will single out every single Member on this side of the House in the most vicious and personalised way. And then he stands up and puts up his best altar-boy look and pretends to the people of Gibraltar that actually it is the heinous GSD that are the negative people in this House.

2360 Let me say that I have no problem with the adversarial system of Government and Opposition, because they were as adversarial as we are being on this side of the House, when they were on this side of the House. They were as adversarial as we are being.

2365 And that is normal. But let's not pretend that they are somehow in a special place when it comes to how we conduct politics. Because –

Madam Speaker: Does the hon. Member have a question? (*Interjections*) Just a minute, just a minute. I am speaking to the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2370

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, I do not have a question in the same way as he did was not purporting to answer questions. He prefaced, if I may, his intervention with: 'Before we carry on with Question Time.'

2375 **Madam Speaker:** I have heard both of you. Now we are moving on to the next question. Moving on to the next question.

Hon. D J Bossino: Well, if I may. They had another substantive ...

2380 The hon. Member is the Leader of the House and not the Speaker of the House. I am addressing the Speaker now.

Madam Speaker: I would ask all hon. Members to sit down. When I speak, no one speaks. We are moving on to the next question.

2385 I will allow you to ask one more supplementary. But I will remind hon. Members that when the Speaker is speaking, Members should not speak. And if they are standing, they should take a seat.

One supplementary without a preamble. (*Interjection*) That is my proviso. No preamble.

Hon. D J Bossino: Understood, Madam Speaker.

2390 The supplementary is this and indeed it is not really a supplementary. It is a substantive question in the Order Paper which the hon. Member has not answered. And it is this: it is 559 and

560, which *both* deal with the issue of costs: costs and timeline, indeed, and costs of the upgrade as to the infrastructure.

Can the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development, who now has responsibility for this project, answer those questions to which he has not responded?

2395

Madam Speaker: All right. The question is there. The Hon. Minister has the floor.

Hon. Sir J J Bossano: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

2400

First of all, I do not know whether the hon. Member has a short memory, but he has been here long enough to know that giving an answer to a question does not mean that you get the answer that you want.

2405

I have been on that side of the House 32 years asking questions, and I have never treated a Government the way they perform. In fact, I used to be attacked for asking a question, never mind answering it. So the position is quite simple. If I tell the Hon. Member no decision has been taken at this stage on the infrastructure, how can I tell him what the cost of no decision is?

Madam Speaker: Next question.

EQUALITY, EMPLOYMENT, CULTURE AND TOURISM

Q490/2024

Gibraltar Travel Guide – Financial contribution

Clerk: Questions to the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism. Question 490. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2410

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: Madam Speaker, is the Government making a financial contribution to the Gibraltar Travel Guide being produced by Outlook Travel; and if so, what is the extent of the same?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2415

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, there is no Government financial contribution to the Gibraltar Travel Guide produced by Outlook Travel.

2420

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: So is this just an opportunity that arose in discussions with that particular entity? Or perhaps the Minister can inform us a bit how that came about.

I am assuming that entities and companies that want to participate in the travel document will then be asked for advertising fees, and so on and so forth. But perhaps the Minister can illuminate us?

2425

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the Outlook business model is that they provide a service free of charge for the Government, and then they look to source interest from commercial enterprises that may be interested to advertise with them. So we are just offered the opportunity to do a travel guide under Gibraltar. And then it is their responsibility whether they find advertising for this or not.

2430

Hon. Dr K Azopardi: And this is an opportunity that the Government would offer any other entity. What is special about Outlook Travel? Or how did this come about? Because I saw from

2435 their own website that they have got this kind of document in relation to specific places around the world, but nothing obviously linking some of these places.

So presumably there are entities out there that run the same kind of business. Am I right to assume that the Government would be happy for any other entity to also do this?

2440 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, part of the remit, or the remit of the Tourist Board is to market Gibraltar as a destination. So any opportunity from any reputable publishing or magazine that gives us the opportunity to promote the destination, we will take.

2445 This is not the first year that this has been done. I have inherited this from the past, and we are given the opportunity to have a travel guide and we take it, and then we get lots of different opportunities from different magazines. Some we pay for advertorials and some are offered to us for free.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q491/2024

**Gibraltar Airport April 2024 –
Early closures; staffing issues; discussions with MOD**

Clerk: Question 491. The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

2450 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** Madam Speaker, has the Government had discussions with the MOD in relation to the early closures of the Gibraltar Airport during April 2024 following reported staffing issues?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2455 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Yes, Madam Speaker.

2460 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** And can the Minister perhaps report to this House what the nature and content of those conversations have been? This is not the first time that in this House we have had questions and discussions about events afflicting the Airport.

This is a further round, so it would be helpful to understand from the Government what the content of those conversations have been.

2465 **Hon. C P Santos:** The MOD kept the Government fully informed of the possibility of a closure, and updated their information as necessary over the period that they were managing their staffing issues.

The exchange of information allowed us to liaise with the handling agents so they could make the relevant changes to their flights. So there were no cancellations on this occasion.

2470 The Airport was affected for five days. They closed early evening, but it only affected flights on three of those days. None of the scheduled flights were cancelled. This was due to some health issues, some prolonged and some short term. From what we discussed after, this was not something that was going to continue happening but happened on this occasion.

2475 **Hon. Dr K Azopardi:** I see. So from the end of that answer, can I assume the Government received assurances that this was a short-term situation and that this is not indicative of any long-term staffing problem?

2480 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I am aware that they had staffing issues in the past. I had discussions about this with them. Some of the health issues are long term and, I am not going to get into the details because it is not for me to discuss other people's health matters. But on this occasion, it was one of those moments where there was a lot of staff illness at the same time, causing shortages of staff at that time.

2485 They assure me that this is not facing the same problems that they did, I think it may have been last year when we had some issues of staffing. So I am confident that this will be something that we will not encounter in the near future.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q607/2024
Gibraltar's parental leave legislation –
Stakeholders; existing policies

Clerk: Question 607. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2490 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Can the Government provide a breakdown of the various stakeholders it is engaging with, and any existing policies it may be referencing in the enhancement of Gibraltar's parental leave legislation?

2495 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Government has met with the Gibraltar Chamber of Commerce, the Gibraltar Federation of Small Businesses, as well as Unite the Union. Representatives from the Ministry of Equality and the Department of Social Security are present at these meetings.
2500 Further discussions are scheduled to take place imminently.

Hon. A Sanchez: I am grateful for that answer.
It would be helpful for the Hon. Minister if he could perhaps provide further clarification on the exact stage of the development of this crucial policy area.

2505 I asked because on the one hand we have a Government press release dated September 2019 claiming that the work undertaken on this was already at an advanced stage. But on the other hand, we seem to have an invitation for a Town Hall event from one of the stakeholders that the Hon. Minister has mentioned, to gather feedback to then provide to the Equality Minister.

2510 And specifically on the invitation it has been described as a potential Government policy, which is in the early stages of development.

Now, of course, whilst we welcome public involvement and consultation as it enriches policy development there seems to be a disparity between advanced stages, and now early stages in 2024. So perhaps the Hon. Minister can clarify this?

2515 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, there is not a disparity with what we say with regard to advanced and what the GFSB, which are the ones I announced for the Town Hall for 4th July, and if anyone has any suggestions that they want to pass on to them, please go and attend the Town Hall.

2520 Whatever they choose to post is up to them. That does not necessarily reflect where we are at. I think that because, as the Hon. Member opposite has mentioned, it is a crucial and very important policy decision that we need to make with regard to parental leave.

Where we are at, is that now I have relooked at everything that was at the advanced stages in 2019, this is not just about how it will affect financially, we are also at a point in the deal that we need to see how that is going to work with cross-border workers.

2525 We are also at a point where I would want to get further details on how the private sector feels about what our policies may be. I have not made anything clear to them. I just want to get their feedback before we, as a Government, decide on what is the best way moving forward for not just with parental leave, but everything to do with leave surrounding childbirth.

2530 I will not get into the details of this, but I want to have the most thorough piece of information that I can in order to make the most adequate and appropriate decisions on something like parental leave.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q608/2024
Blue Badge applications –
Received; approved; disallowed; denied

Clerk: Question 608. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2535

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government provide the number of applications received for Blue Badge permits, along with the number of applications approved – permits issued – and the number of applications disallowed or denied for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to current date?

2540

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the Blue Badge statistics are as follows:

2545

- 2021: 99 Blue Badge Applications
91 Approved
8 Not Approved
- 2022: 103 Blue Badge Applications
90 Approved
13 Not Approved
- 2023: 155 Blue Badge Applications
142 Approved
13 Not Approved
- 2024: 87 Blue Badge Applications
69 Approved
13 Not Approved
5 pending panel

2550

2555

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q609/2024
Frontier Passes –
Received; approved; disallowed; denied

2560 **Clerk:** Question 609/2024. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government state how many applications for Frontier Passes have been received, accepted – passes issued – and disallowed or denied, delineated by the following years: 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to current date.

2565

Clerk: The Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the statistics for the Frontier Passes are as follows:

YEAR	RECEIVED	APPROVED	REFUSED
2019	29	24	5
2020	18	16	2
2021	75	67	8
2022	83	71	12
2023	74	54	20
2024	72	49	19

2570 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Madam Speaker, Would the Hon. Minister be able to clarify what is the eligibility criteria for the Frontier Passes?

2575 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, we just hand out the Frontier Passes after the approval of a medical panel. At the moment I am not quite sure what the eligibility criteria is. We just get the forms at the SNDO office, which we just took this over in April 2024. We pass it on to a medical professional to sign and stamp, and then it goes to a medical panel; and then we receive the information back, and we either give the Frontier Pass or not give the Frontier Pass.

2580 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Is there anywhere I can find this criteria, as it is not publicly available?

Hon. C P Santos: I am not quite sure, because this is a medical decision, so we try and keep out of the decision-making process.

So we go through the admin and we pass it through to the medical panel which makes these decisions. I am unsure whether this is or is not published.

2585

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Reyes.

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

2590 I hope that the Minister might be able to clarify for me, it in part refers as well to Question 608. Looking at the number of applications and so on, and numbers granted, am I correct in assuming that these passes either for Blue Badge or the Frontier Passes are not issued *ad infinitum*, but rather have an expiry date. And therefore, my adding up all the numbers there does not mean that there are x hundreds of passes valid at any given time.

2595 If there is an expiry date, then that could account for the numbers currently in validity not being not being as high as 300 or 400 or whatever my mathematical conclusion will come to. And

if that is the case, is the Minister aware of what are the lifespan of these passes issued? Because I am assuming that many of them are being issued on medical grounds.

The person requiring that might hope to get better, especially with mobility issues, and therefore at times spent there. Any information would be grateful.

2600

Hon. C P Santos: Currently we are reviewing the process with regard to people who would need it for an extended period of time. There are people who are not going to get better from their condition. Currently there is an expiry date. I am not 100% sure what the expiry time is. I can find this out for you and I will no doubt let you know.

2605

But there are some temporary passes that you can apply. If it is a temporary disability, for example, you may have come out of an operation, or you may be immobile for a certain period of time, and those are temporary. Those have expiry dates that are according to what your case is.

2610

The longer term ones need to be renewed. But as I said, we are looking for those who have chronic disabilities to not have to have these renewed after three or four years. I am not quite sure what the lifespan of the Blue Badge or the Frontier Passes are, but I will find out and let you know.

Madam Speaker: Yes, the Hon. Mr Bossino.

2615

Hon. D J Bossino: If I may, when the Hon. the Minister, in respect of his last reply, he talks about 'the review in respect of those individuals who have a permanent disability'.

2620

Can I take from that, that in effect what he is saying is that the Government has made the decision in relation to that. It is a policy decision that those individuals who are suffering from a chronic, permanent condition will no longer need to go through the process of reapplying, because in some respects, it can be almost demeaning to be able to say, 'Well, actually, this person still has ...' Especially if you are doing it on behalf of somebody else. It is just an added stress they need to go through. Not big stress, but nevertheless it is an added administrative and bureaucratic hurdle.

2625

Let me just say that I think we would support the Government in relation to that. But the question is: is it a policy decision which the Government has arrived at? And it is a question of reviewing it from an *administrative* perspective.

2630

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I would not necessarily describe having a disability or having to apply for anything to do with a disability as demeaning. We all do as people. We renew our ID cards and that is not necessarily a demeaning process.

I understand what the Member opposite is trying to say, but I would not necessarily use that terminology. But that is my own use of language.

2635

Now, what we have done, to answer your question, yes, this is a policy decision. We are creating a database so that we can make sure that that it is linked to a general Government database so that people with a chronic disability do not need to apply just because it is seasonal, not necessarily, because I think they would find it demeaning just because it is from an administrative perspective.

2640

It will work better for us and it is not as time consuming. And if you have a permanent disability, there will still be a scan. We still need to check that you are in the system, but it will not be the way that it is working now.

2645

Hon. D J Bossino: For the Member, it seems that I am choosing my words wrongly for the Hon. Members opposite. I said it and I meant what I said, and 'demeaning emotional hurdle' call it what you will, but do I take it then that the answer to the question that I posed is yes, that the Government has come to a policy decision in relation to this, which we support, if that is the case, and that really what it is doing is looking at the administrative aspects of it, databases and all the rest of it, to then make that policy decision come to fruition.

Hon. C P Santos: Yes. This is what I was answering, as you were muttering on the other side. But yes, I said, this is a policy decision we make and to make the administrative process easier.

2650

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q610-11/2024

**Bruce's Farm community-based programme –
Individuals chosen to enter**

Clerk: Question 610. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2655

Madam Speaker: I have not called order yet since I have been in the Chair, but I might have to today. Can we have silence so that the Hon. Mrs Sanchez can put her question?

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide the figures for how many individuals have chosen to enter the community-based programme, which mirrors aspects of the programme at Bruce's Farm for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date.

2660

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 611.

2665

Clerk: Question 611. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Could the Government provide the figures for how many individuals have been admitted on to, or chosen to enter the residential in-house programme at Bruce's Farm for the following years: 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date?

2670

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker.

2675

Answer to Question 610

Year	Clients
2021	158
2022	145
2023	182
2024 to present date	102

2680

2685

Answer to Question 611

Year	Clients Admitted to OARS Residential Programme at Bruce's Farm
2021	61
2022	44
2023	46
2024 to present date	24

Hon. A Sanchez: And in relation to question 610, the figures seem to be rather high.

2690 Can the Hon. Minister state whether the Government is assessing these figures and how they are presenting, and elaborate on how the Government intends to continue to develop this area of service?

2695 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, we are analysing the figures. Firstly, I would like to explain that the figures for the community-based programme may seem higher because the community based programme can be used as a secondary step after you have had the residential, as well as people who choose to not go into residential in-house programme at Bruce's Farm and just do the community-based programme.

2700 Whilst a figure that seems high may seem like a negative, we see it as a positive. We see it as people wanting to get better, wanting to get treatment. There is more awareness, more support in the system, so more people are taking up these opportunities.

2705 So we know that people take drugs. The good thing about this is that people are choosing to get out of that circle. And for us, the higher the figure, what it is saying is not more people are using drugs, it is more people want to leave drugs.

Hon. A Sanchez: Grateful for that answer, but nonetheless it also signifies that there is a continuing problem with people that are actually using drugs. And my question is how the Government intends to continue to develop this area of service further? And the Hon. Minister has not addressed that question.

2710 **Hon. C P Santos:** If 158 seems like a high number of people using drugs in Gibraltar, we are really doing well. That is zero-point something percent of the community. So I think it is actually too low for people wanting to get out of drugs. But anyway, what we are doing is we are working, we have reconvened the Drugs Advisory Council.

2715 So we have got stakeholders from all different sectors of the community. We are working inter-ministerially between the Ministry of Justice as well as the Ministry of Health and Care to see how we can continue to support people who want to stop taking drugs; how we can minimise the use; and minimise the harm.

2720 We are working together to create new programmes as well. As you know, the rehabilitation services are working really well. We are trying to upskill people within the rehabilitation services so that we can get them into employment after they leave. We have got all different types of initiatives that we are looking at in the Drugs Advisory Council.

So this is what we are doing as a Government at the moment.

2725 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q612-13/2024

**Drugs and alcohol rehabilitation –
Weekly programmes; aftercare**

Clerk: Question 612. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government state how many programmes are offered on a weekly basis to clients needing aftercare support from drugs and alcohol rehabilitation services?

2730

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 613.

2735

Clerk: Question 613. The Hon. A Sanchez.

Hon. A Sanchez: Can the Government provide the figures for the number of individuals attending the aftercare programme on a weekly basis for drugs and alcohol rehabilitation services for the following years: 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 to present date?

2740

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, the total number of programmes offered on a weekly basis to clients needing aftercare support is three. And no records were held for the year 2020; however, I now hand over a schedule with the rest of the information requested.

2745

Answer to Question 613

Year 2021

Week ending	25-Apr	02-May	09-May	16-May	23-May	30-May	06-Jun	14-Jun	20-Jun	
Number of Individuals	2	3	18	12	0	4	7	8	4	
Week ending	27-Jun	04-Jul	11-Jul	18-Jul	25-Jul	01-Aug	08-Aug	15-Aug	22-Aug	
Number of Individuals	12	11	2	14	8	14	13	16	7	
Week ending	29-Aug	05-Sep	12-Sep	19-Sep	26-Sep	03-Oct	10-Oct	17-Oct	24-Oct	
Number of Individuals	24	10	6	8	19	0	9	13	9	
Week ending	31-Oct	07-Nov	14-Nov	21-Nov	28-Nov	05-Dec	12-Dec	19-Dec	26-Dec	02-Jan
Number of Individuals	5	12	22	15	7	13	7	9	2	0

2750

2755

Year 2022

Week ending	09-Jan	16-Jan	23-Jan	30-Jan	06-Feb	13-Feb
Number of Individuals	1	1	5	0	7	12
Week ending	13-Mar	20-Mar	27-Mar	03-Apr	10-Apr	17-Apr
Number of Individuals	22	17	21	10	11	14
Week ending	15-May	22-May	29-May	05-Jun	12-Jun	19-Jun
Number of Individuals	16	18	19	18	18	20
Week ending	17-Jul	24-Jul	31-Jul	07-Aug	14-Aug	21-Aug
Number of Individuals	16	20	16	14	15	26
Week ending	18-Sep	25-Sep	02-Oct	09-Oct	16-Oct	23-Oct
Number of Individuals	18	23	23	20	26	24
Week ending	20-Nov	27-Nov	04-Dec	11-Dec	18-Dec	25-Dec
Number of Individuals	20	18	22	25	27	31

Continued Answer to Year 2022

20 Feb	27 Feb	06 Mar
12	12	15
24 Apr	01 May	08 May
20	17	28
26 Jun	03 Jul	10 Jul
24	18	16
28 Aug	04 Sep	11 Sep
22	26	14
30 Oct	06 Nov	13 Nov
22	22	23

2760

Continued Answer to Question 613

Week ending	01-Jan	08-Jan	15-Jan	22-Jan	29-Jan	05-Feb	12-Feb	19-Feb	26-Feb
Number of Individuals	36	29	36	29	32	35	29	34	38
Week ending	05-Mar	12-Mar	19-Mar	26-Mar	02-Apr	09-Apr	16-Apr	23-Apr	30-Apr
Number of Individuals	37	42	28	29	26	19	21	32	36
Week ending	07-May	14-May	21-May	28-May	04-Jun	11-Jun	18-Jun	25-Jun	02-Jul
Number of Individuals	38	30	36	41	36	34	42	32	38
Week ending	09-Jul	16-Jul	23-Jul	30-Jul	06-Aug	13-Aug	20-Aug	27-Aug	03-Sep
Number of Individuals	33	38	38	43	33	36	43	39	36
Week ending	10-Sep	17-Sep	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov
Number of Individuals	32	40	39	42	37	23	42	38	40
Week ending	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	24-Dec	31-Dec	
Number of Individuals	41	40	44	27	52	47	45	37	

2765

To present date

Week ending	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	03-Mar
Number of Individuals	33	47	42	35	39	43	32	34	45
Week ending	10-Mar	17-Mar	24-Mar	31-Mar	07-Apr	14-Apr	21-Apr	28-Apr	05-May
Number of Individuals	41	46	33	22	32	43	32	41	21
Week ending	12-May	19-May	26-May	02-Jun	09-Jun	16-Jun			
Number of Individuals	42	36	25	27	28	24			

2770 **Madam Speaker:** All right, we will move on to the next question. Or do you have a supplementary on 612? Yes.

Hon. A Sanchez: And, Madam Speaker, I appreciate that perhaps the Hon. Minister might not have this information, but perhaps he can shed some light on this.

2775 In terms of young people can the Hon. Minister share whether the Government is concerned about drug and alcohol misuse in young people and perhaps elaborate on the programs available for them specifically, and the help that they and their parents or guardians can receive on this matter.

2780 **Hon. C P Santos:** Well, Madam Speaker, I would need notice of that to know what the numbers of young people are. I can tell you that we have a very well-rounded programme, and I take it that with young people you mean people between 16 and 24? Is that the information I need to get?

2785 We are working within the Drugs Advisory Council and the youth services involved. I am very fortunate to also be Minister for Youth. So I have the opportunity to work within all nine Ministries to have one cohesive, seamless programme where we develop programmes not just for young people, but for everyone as a whole.

So I will look in to see what the statistics are with regard to age.

Madam Speaker: All right.

2790 Would the Hon. Member like me to give her some time to look at the Schedule? All right, so we will come back to Question 613 and we will move on now.

**Q614-15/2024
PATHS programme –
Current setup; support**

Clerk: Question 614. The Hon. A Sanchez.

2795 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Government provide details on the current setup and operation of the PATHS programme?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2800 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 615.

Clerk: Question 615, the Hon. G Origo.

2805 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, what sort of support will be offered and who will be offering such support to those enrolled on the PATHS initiative, which is designed to empower and upskill these individuals?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2810 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the Professional Advancement through Holistic Skills Programme – the PATHS programme – as I have previously mentioned in Parliament, is a Government initiative designed to enhance employability by addressing individuals' skill gaps through the provision of short-term courses and providing comprehensive, bespoke support to the individuals.

2815 Currently, we have rolled out these within our Supported Employment Scheme participants and we are under way with the below entities whereby we have had to establish clear pathways and procedures specific to the type of user.

Employment: we will be upskilling participants who are actively seeking employment or are currently enrolled in a training scheme.

2820 We have a collaboration with HMP Windmill Hill, partnering with this initiative to launch a work reintegration programme by upskilling those serving a prison sentence who are unemployed.

We are working with the Rehabilitation Services, providing upskilling opportunities through our Rehabilitation Services.

And the Youth Services, integrating the programme with 'The Zone', which is the scheme for Neet, those 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' for young individuals.

2825 Once a participant is identified, our Ministry arranges for one of the tailored packages to be applied based on the individual's skills and the identified gaps within our workforce. The courses are conducted at the Digital Skills Academy and upon successful completion participants receive certification from the course provider, officially endorsed by myself on behalf of the Ministry.

2830 The support provided to these individuals is facilitated not only by our Employment Services, but also by our Ministry. As part of the PATHS initiative we have developed comprehensive support packages designed with a holistic approach.

These packages are offered in collaboration with various service providers in Gibraltar, delivering one-on-one sessions, workshops and group sessions.

2835 These services focus on confidence building, communication skills, mental health support and job coaching to ensure a well-rounded and effective support system. By focusing on a holistic approach to skill development, the programme will see individuals achieve personal and professional growth, leading to better job opportunities, career advancements and overall economic development.

2840 **Hon. A Sanchez:** I am grateful for that answer, Madam Speaker. And could the Hon. Member Minister clarify how is the individual identified? Is it through a referral or does the individual have to apply themselves? Can he clarify this?

2845 **Hon. C P Santos:** PATHS is an employment programme, Madam Speaker, so it is usually referred to via either employment, if it's someone who is seeking employment. And due to the lack of the qualifications required in order to advance in their placements or in the job sector that they wish to enrol in, they can choose upon discussions with the Employment Department whether they want to continue doing some upskilling through paths.

2850 The collaboration with the prison itself is basically for the prisoners there at the moment. They have a chance to go and upskill, be it through their carpentry workshop or they have got a computer suite.

Rehab the same, it is out of choice. And then the Youth Services are referred through NEET. So usually it is a referral of different Departments that are relating to offering employment or employability or advice to Members of the community who may need to upskill.

2855 **Hon. A Sanchez:** And where can people find information about this? Is there any information online? Are there any guidance notes? Is there any anything published online where people can refer to?

Hon. C P Santos: At the moment we are doing it via the actual Departments, or for example as I said employment, prison, rehabilitation, youth or supported employment.

It has not been an individual referral getting in touch with the Ministry. Usually it is a referral through one of these Departments themselves, which is about upskilling due to employability. So for example, when they go to a clinic at the employment they will be advised parties on offer for you.

2865 We are rolling it out to all the other to all the other Departments. We started on a pilot scheme to make sure that it worked with the support of employment company. So it was offered to those people who are in the supported employment programme. But it is not something that we get direct from individuals into the Ministry. They need to go through one of the programmes or Departments.

2870

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mr Origo.

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

2875 I just wanted to ask in relation to some of the comments you just said. He mentioned that this was a pilot scheme. I think we had conversations earlier on how this was previously targeted at people transitioning from supported employment to rehabilitation and prison, and then this has been expanded to include more individuals.

2880 The last time I asked this question last month in this House, I think there were 11 individuals between 16 and 24 enrolled. But given that the Hon. Minister has just acknowledged that he has opened up the course, can you confirm whether this number has increased or does he have a number for how many people are enrolled on it now?

2885 **Hon. C P Santos:** This was never a pilot scheme. The pilot scheme was the opening it up to supported employment. This is when we created PATHS. It was for all the five different Departments. We decided to pilot it with supportive employment because it was within a complement that we were offering.

I am not sure what the numbers are exactly of people taking it up. I would need a notification of this, but it is easily accessible, I can ask tomorrow and let you know.

2890 **Madam Speaker:** The Hon. Mr Sacarello.

Hon. C Sacarello: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

2895 I am just seeking clarification here. As I understand it from the Hon. Minister, Madam Speaker, the scheme is covering rehabilitation, youth and prisoners, but it also includes supported employment. I know that supported employment has quite strict criteria and is limited in its scope as to who it can help. As you know, the Hon. Minister and I have been in discussions about a couple of people who did not quite meet that criteria, but it seems that path does not quite catch them.

2900 There are a few people in need of support who go through the net. I understand that the Hon. Minister's intention initially was that this scheme would pick those people up in the net. Would he be able to confirm if people would say serious medical issues that affect them getting a normal job, but are not young, are not a prisoner, or are not a drug addict? Would they be picked up in the scheme too? Because I am sure that they would like the comfort of that?

2905 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, the first point that I think you have missed is my first one was employment. So it is upskilling participants who are actively seeking employment.

So we have got five different pathways you can go in through, as I said: (1) Employment; (2) Windmill Hill; (3) Rehabilitation Services; (4) Youth Services; (5) Supported Employment.

2910 But the first one is employment. Anyone who is seeking employment does not necessarily need to be a young person. It can be anyone from any age who is currently seeking employment or currently enrolled in a training scheme, or even who are through the employment scheme and want to just upskill. They can do this through the Employment Department.

Hon. C Sacarello: Sorry, I am just seeking clarification, Madam Speaker, and I thank you for that answer.

2915 But obviously the ETB provides some support in this sense. I was just trying to find the differentiation between the two in terms of what added benefit someone would have going into PATHS, as opposed to down the ETB route.

2920 **Hon. C P Santos:** PATHS is a supplementary programme. It is not a standalone programme that will get you employed. The ETB, then there could be someone who enrolls in the ETB and they are offered PATHS as something that they can take on. This will be rolled out in September by the way, through the employment. So through the ETB. And we are rolling them out as soon as we can possibly make them happen in all of them.

2925 But in September or hopefully earlier, we will roll this out through the ETB. This is what I meant by employment. So you will be offered that as one of your options.

2930 But doing PATHS is not like doing a degree or doing a course at college. You can do it in your own time. You can do it whilst you are working. You can do it whilst you are trying to upskill to get work. So for example, these are series of courses that are broken down into different categories of fields that you want to get into, whether it is general skills, construction or customer service or retail.

2935 And there are courses that you do to upskill and you can choose to do these, but you do not need to. It is not like a course at the college that you need to commit to a month of it. You can do it in your own time, according to when it is offered, but you can carry on living your life. It is not like you are there, committed to five or six days a week to do this.

Madam Speaker: Hon. Mr Bossino.

2940 **Hon. D J Bossino:** That sparks an interest on this side of the House. So in the offers that his Department is making, which is I think he has mentioned the five different PATHS. In any of that, is there what used to be known as the Future Job Strategy, which was heralded as a new policy when the new 2011 administration walked into office still a thing? Or has that been abandoned?

2945 **Hon. C P Santos:** The point of the Government is to offer employment opportunities and the Future Job Strategy is something that has been working and is constantly developing. So this is in addition to basically getting people into employment.

2950 What we find is that, from my experiences, we need to offer everyone as many opportunities as possible. So this is the beginning of hopefully what we will continue to create in new programmes, so that people will have more opportunities to develop, more opportunities to upskill so that people have more choices.

So this is an extension on what we do as a Government with regard to employment.

Madam Speaker: The Hon. Mrs Sanchez.

2955 **Hon. A Sanchez:** Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether the PATHS programme has replaced the supported employment model or is it another avenue as well as?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, it is another avenue. The Supported Employment Programme has now been extended so we have the Supported Employment Company that works as a company to employ people. But we also have the Supported Employment Programme.

2960 We just did a conference not that long ago to get more interest from employers, to get more people into direct employment. So the Supported Employment Programme still works to support employers and employees with regard to getting people into employment.

2965 PATHS is essentially a chance for you to get certification and upskill. So, for example, you may want to do a course in Microsoft Office, as one of the things we have identified, after we have looked at over 45,000 vacancies to see where the gaps are with regard to locals, and see what the different pathways are. We have construction, retail, development, courses on mental health and well-being, hospitality and care, and generic employability skills.

2970 So this is an opportunity for someone. It is essentially like going to a library and getting books and going to the reference library and studying, but in a way that works for you. And it is a bespoke type of course for a person that does not feel like they have the necessary qualifications so they can get a little bit more knowledge. As well as that, some people lack confidence or self-esteem, so we also work on that. What the aim of PATHS is, is to give people more chances. We are becoming more employable, in a holistic way.

2975 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q616/2024
Parasports –
Establishment of plans

Clerk: Question is 616. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: What plans does the Government have to establish parasports in Gibraltar?

2980 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

2985 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, coincidentally, we set out we sent out invitations to a parasports taster day to several of our Government Ministries on Friday, 14th June 2024. We have been developing this since February 2024, and this event is scheduled to take place on 4th July 2024 as a preliminary session ahead of our main event, which will be a full corporate and family Parasports Day in September 2024 in Gibraltar, which will become an annual event.

2990 The Parasports Association has already procured 10 wheelchairs specifically for this event. The day will feature opportunities for private entities to register as teams, followed by sessions for families and friends to participate. Activities will include wheelchair basketball, sitting volleyball, and goalball among other sports.

In addition to this, we are looking at having an annual Rock Relay by the end of this year.

2995 The main goal of our Parasports Taster Day and full sports day will be to promote inclusivity, provide competitive opportunities and encourage physical fitness and social integration for people with disabilities, aside from having community engagement and raising awareness.

We are working on this together with the GSLA and the Ministry of Sport who, as the Sports Authority, will build on the prototypes we are designing and facilitating.

3000 **Hon. G Origo:** Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the Hon. Minister for his answer. I just want to ask, in relation to the work that has been carried out, and I appreciate he informs this House that recent moves have been made in this respect.

But does the Hon. Minister have any idea of the number of parasports athletes that would be here in Gibraltar? So that would give you some data, which would then guide on the Government policy and what to do with the parasports plans?

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Hon. C P Santos: With regard to data and parasports, this is aimed at people who have physical disabilities, but it is not exclusive to those with physical disabilities.

A lot of it is about the promotion of parasports as a whole will include those people who are not necessarily people with disabilities. I do not have the figures of who would want to go into this, it is the same as asking me how many people want to go into pickleball. I do not know. But I can find out what type of interest has been in the past, if you if you would like that data.

3010

Hon. G Origo: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and grateful to the Minister for his answer.

And then, if I may just ask in terms of the actual sports, has consideration been given to what sports in particular in the parasports? I think he described it as an annual event that might take place, so will there be some type of league that is created, or what are the plans the Government have in mind in relation to parasports?

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Hon. C P Santos: The type of sports, we have someone working for the Ministry of Equality who is a para-athlete. So he is leading on this project as such.

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We are we are trying to bring awareness to parasports at the moment, and we are working very closely with the Ministry of Sport and the GSLA, who will then take on that we are doing it from an equality perspective at the moment, because we have got that member of staff with us, and then we will see how it can progress.

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I am not quite sure whether where we are at with leagues and how that will work, but it is important to give every individual the opportunity to be able to take up sports or any other activity that they so wish.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q617/2024
UK Dive Show –
Business attracted

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Clerk: Question 617. The Hon. G Origo.

Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, what business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the UK Dive Show in Coventry at the beginning of March this year?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the UK Dive Show is the largest dive show in the UK and it was an opportunity to target the consumers directly and the UK dive industry in general. We have now been listed in the Dive Worldwide website that was launched on 17th June 2024, which is very positive news.

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And attending the show has not only promoted Gibraltar as a significant diving destination, but has also provided us with essential networking opportunities and market insight required in the development of this niche market within our Tourism sector.

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Hon. G Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you to the Minister for his answer.

In respect to the reference to diving, I believe from having looked this up myself, that the UK Dive Show relates to scuba diving and underwater sea diving more in particular. So I wondered whether the Government has any plans to adopt a Government scuba-diving school of some kind, or what the actual purpose was for attending a scuba-diving show in the first place?

3050

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, as part of Tourism, we need to promote the destination.

So we have decided as well to look at the niche markets in order to be able to attract numbers of people who would choose Gibraltar as a place for leisure, not just for business.

3055

We realised upon further inspection of what we have to offer as Gibraltar, that one of the things that we have, which is very unique to us in this area, is scuba diving. There is a huge interest, something that I was not really aware of until I did some research. We have a lot of wrecks. We have a nice coral reefs. We have a beautiful area by Rosia Bay. There is a lot of interest and it is something that we are promoting from a tourism perspective in order to bring more people into Gibraltar.

3060

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q618/2024
Dusseldorf BOOT Show –
Business attracted

Clerk: Question 618. The Hon. G. Origo.

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Hon. G. Origo: What business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the BOOT show in Dusseldorf earlier this year?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

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Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, the first visit was a networking opportunity and it was instrumental in understanding the scale of the show and evaluating its value should we choose to attend as an exhibitor in the future.

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Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, the Hon. Minister says that the purpose of attending this show was to network. Can I ask if the networking was successful; and if so how that has generated any business for Gibraltar?

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Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, as I said, this was to evaluate its value, so we did not attend as an exhibitor. We attended as part of an audience. I sent the CEO of tourism over to check out whether this was a positive conference and something that would bring business to Gibraltar.

They focus on yachting, scuba diving as well, and anything to do with water sports and activities.

3085

We are still to assess whether we want to continue attending and become an exhibitor. We are working together with local stakeholders who might get involved with us, because with a lot of these conferences, we go with someone because we are only there to market the destination. But then there are people who then decide to work more closely with people and bring the tours and it is tour operator-based.

So there was no business per se yet. This happened a few months ago, and as I said, it was a chance for us to meet different tour operators, see if it was of interest. There was over 214,000 visitors. So we need to assess whether this is something we want to take on in the future.

3090

Next question.

Q619/2024
Seatrade Cruise Global 2024 –
Business attracted

Clerk: Question 619. The Hon. G. Origo.

3095 **Hon. G. Origo:** What business, if any, has been attracted to Gibraltar in attending the Seatrade Cruise Global 2024, in Miami Beach, USA, earlier this year?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

3100 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, Seatrade Global in Miami is a key show in the global cruising market as all the major cruise companies attend the show.

It is difficult to quantify, but attending this type of conference is clearly working as figures are up to 12% from 2023 to the current year; and bookings for 2025 are up 24% from the current 2024. So in actual fact, we are up 18% from 2019.

3105 **Hon. G. Origo:** Madam Speaker, grateful for that answer.

I would ask the Minister what the aim or purpose of this trip would be, but I suppose it would be very evident, which is to network or attract new businesses or more cruise calls to Gibraltar. So I will skip that and go to my next question. Which would be: was that achieved? And if so, how?

3110 Because in answer to questions in Parliament last month, we understand that £14,000 was spent to send two delegates to Miami. And I just want to assess whether this trip was worthwhile or not.

3115 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I think the trip was very worth it.

As I said, we are already 18% above 2019, which is before COVID. And then at £14,000 for two delegates to travel to Miami, when you come to think about it we are at already 25% from last year. And if we look at the figures that every cruise ship visitor spend is £52.30 per person, this means that we would only need 265 people to come down and spend that in order to get to the £14,000 that we spent to bring, maybe, I think it is over 40 cruise ships between 2024 and 2025.

3120 So really, I think it is very worth it.

Hon. G. Origo: Madam Speaker, thank you. Thanks to the Hon. Minister for his answer.

3125 He does make references to the cruise calls being better than they were in previous years, and these have been upped by 18%. I do not know if he compared that to 2019 or what was the reference?

But I wanted to ask whether he connects the increases in cruise calls here to Gibraltar, to this trip, which I asked for in the beginning of my questions. My question was whether this business trip, per se, has attracted any new business to Gibraltar. And if he answers that a particular cruise has called in Gibraltar as a result of that trip, then I will take that answer for what it is worth.

3130 But I just wanted to inquire from him whether he has made any contacts, made any networks, or secured further calls to Gibraltar.

Hon. C P Santos: I know you have asked, Madam Speaker, I know the Hon. Member has asked about *this* particular trip, but the cruising industry works on a 12 to 24 months advance bookings;

3135 which means that the work that we have seen in 2024 is of the work that my predecessor did two years ago.

This is not a conference that I just went to this year. This is something that we go annually and it is something that we have clearly seen the increase.

3140 So I will see the numbers of these bookings reflected in 2025, which we are already seeing an increase, and 2026. So does this particular one trip prove a success? Well, we go every year, and every year the numbers keep on increasing. And as I said, we need about 265 people only in a year from cruise ships that come with £5000 to spend just that money without counting any expenditure on shore excursions or any port fees or anything.

3145 So I think that it is money well invested in making Gibraltar a destination that people want to continue coming; and on cruises especially.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q620/2024
Windmill Hill Prison –
Reintegration support for leavers

Clerk: Question 620. The Hon. J Ladislaus.

3150 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** Madam Speaker, when a prisoner leaves Windmill Hill Prison after they have served their sentence, what support is in place to ease their reintegration into society?

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

3155 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, our Ministry has created the Rehabilitation and Prison Leavers Work Reintegration Programme under the Supported Employment Programme, and there is a team specifically working on this. This Programme aims to increase employability and provide employment opportunities for members of our community who may require additional support. This includes those serving a
3160 prison sentence.

It is important to highlight that in order for the prison cohort to have a smooth transition to life outside of the prison setting, this requires a co-ordinated approach. Our team at the Ministry has been liaising with senior management at HMP Windmill Hill, Ministry of Justice, Probation and Community Service teams.

3165 Support for the prison cohort starts when they are institutionalised, as this is an opportunity to upskill and prepare prison leavers for release through quality education and training opportunities. The education opportunities within the Prison are being developed together with the College of Further Education. Additionally, through our PATHS programme, the prison cohort will be able to avail themselves of the opportunity to take online accredited courses to increase
3170 their employability, as well as a variety of workshops with qualified practitioners, which will target their mental health and well-being.

Our research has established the various job skill gaps within the labour market in Gibraltar, and we have created pathways to employment for these sectors. This means that upon successful completion of the PATHS Programme during their time serving sentence at HMP Windmill Hill, the
3175 prisoner will be able to join our work reintegration programme after release. This initiative will not only give the individual a sense of structure, purpose and empowerment, it will also assist in the reduction of re-offending rates.

3180 **Hon. J Ladislaus:** I am grateful for the very comprehensive answer, because the Hon. Minister said that it has been worked upon. But when can we expect this programme to commence?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, this has been worked on for the past few months. I have had meetings with my colleagues, the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Care, who together will have what happens after they leave prison with regard to that side of things.

3185 Currently we are just waiting for a connection of the computers at the moment. So this is where we are at. We have designed all the programmes, and now we have to make sure that the physical setup is there. So hopefully we will start as soon as this happens, hopefully very soon.

Madam Speaker: Yes?

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Hon. J Ladislaus: In terms of accommodation, because we have heard about the programme, which is very welcome indeed. Because to date, to my knowledge, there is no such programme in place for that reintegration.

3195 But what about accommodation? Has that been looked at? For example, a halfway house sort of sort of programme where people can reintegrate.

Hon. C P Santos: With regard to housing, I am not the correct person to answer. I think this is something that you may need to give notice of and my colleague over here at housing may be able to answer this. But we are looking at ... From my side, I am doing this through employment. So it is about reintegration with regard to employment.

3200

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q621/2024

Labour inspectors/Government officials – Non-registered workers apprehended

Clerk: Question 621. The Hon. C Sacarello.

3205 **Hon. C Sacarello:** Could the Government please provide a breakdown of interventions where its labour inspectors or other Government officials have questioned and/or apprehended individuals or companies who are locally registered and licensed, but who are using workers not registered with the ETB or any other valid authority?

3210 Please list this activity monthly for the last six months, including a separate column for fines issued to each entity per month and another column for fines actually settled by each entity per month.

Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

3215 **Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos):** Madam Speaker, the Labour Inspectorate does not conduct interventions. The Inspectorate is tasked with the enforcement of our Employment Laws and are empowered to enter, at all reasonable times, any premises or place liable to inspection as may be necessary for ascertaining whether the provisions of the Employment Regulations are adhered to.

3220 The breakdown of inspections undertaken over the last six months including total of fines issued and paid is as follows:

January 24 – 77 inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Fixed-penalty notices zero; fixed-penalty notices paid, zero.

3225 February 24 – 132 inspections. Seven employers contravening Employment Regulation. Two fixed-penalty notices issued; one fixed-penalty notice paid.

March 24 – 81 inspections. Two employers contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

April 24 – 53 inspections. Four employers contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

3230 May 24 – 48 number of inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

And June 24 – 10 inspections. One employer contravening Employment Regulation. Zero fixed-penalty notices issued; zero fixed-penalty notices paid.

3235 The Government is committed to the eradication of illegal labour, and that level playing field is maintained by ensuring that all businesses are compliant with the Employment Regulations.

	No. of Inspections	No. of Employers contravening Employment	Fixed Penalty Notices Issued	Fixed Penalty Notices Paid
Jan-24	77	1	0	0
Feb-24	132	7	2	1
Mar-24	81	2	0	0
Apr-24	53	4	0	0
May-24	48	1	0	0
Jun-24	10	1	0	0

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister, and that last comment there certainly makes sense, and I think that everyone on this side of the House would concur with that sentiment.

3240 The figures you provided, just looking at them very quickly seem to fluctuate in terms of the number of inspections carried out per month. Would the Minister care to explain how the Department works in terms of how it sets its targets for finding companies that are worth investigating and how they go about determining how many inspections to carry out on a monthly basis?

3245 **Hon. C P Santos:** I would need to find out exactly what the figures are.

I cannot imagine that there are set figures that we need to inspect a certain amount of employers. A lot of it comes from maybe concerns that we may have had. As you may see with figures, there are a lot of inspections. And then employers who are found contravening Employment Regulation and not necessarily all are served a fixed-penalty notice.

3250 We start by giving them a warning and then we issue a fixed penalty notice after we have found them as repeat offenders.

Hon. C Sacarello: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister for that supplementary reply.

3255 But also, would the Hon. Minister be willing to provide information once gathered and ascertained as to the details governing the decision making about inspecting? And also, if the Hon. Minister would not mind providing some information on perhaps a breakdown between how the Department goes about investigating themselves and the level of whistleblowing and how they react to that type of report.

3260 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, I will discuss this with, of course, my Department and give you the pertinent information that does not break the Employment Regulations confidentiality. So if you send me an email to remind me, I will be able to get you that information.

Madam Speaker: Next question.

Q622/2024

Airport –

Adequately resourced; efficiently offloading

3265 **Clerk:** Question 622. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Is the Airport adequately resourced to deal with the offloading of luggage in an efficient manner?

3270 **Clerk:** Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, *Gibair*, the Ground Handling company is adequately resourced for the current operations as they stand although these are kept under constant review and form part of the consultations that are held with the airlines.

The Airport is bi-seasonal and has to be able to cope with a busy summer schedule and a quieter winter schedule, and the current levels allow it to operate comfortably all year.

In addition to this, there is constant active engagement with the airlines so, where possible, arrival times are not conflicted. Therefore, aircraft do not arrive at the same time.

3280 On the occasions when there are four aircraft scheduled to arrive in one morning – currently twice a week – delays at the originating airport, weather and other operational factors can affect these and the resource available will get stretched. But this is not uncommon in the aviation industry and we are able to cope well.

3285 **Hon. D J Bossino:** The Hon. Minister says that he is in effect satisfied with the current arrangements, and he sets out the attempts which are made in order to avoid, in effect, a clogging of the system. Which is the reason why I asked the question, because it was put to me that there was one incident – I suppose in many respects it could be that we are victims of our own success in that regard, that there were I think three flights on that occasion, and on this occasion the information that I have, unless it is in any way wrong, was on this occasion, three flights – which resulted in massive delays as far as the luggage-handling is concerned, and indeed by adequately resourced airports.

3295 What I am also referring to is specifically whether there are basic amenities available for those passengers who have to wait. One issue is to address the administrative backlog which results as a result of these flights coming at the same time. And the other issue is offering literally water to passengers, I was told that there was not even water available even to purchase or certainly not freely available.

So I would ask him, please, to put himself on inquiry as to whether, in fact, it is working as well as he is suggesting in his response.

3300 **Hon. C P Santos:** Madam Speaker, what is your question? Is there a question?

Hon. D J Bossino: Would he put himself into inquiry to check whether, in fact – I thought the question was pretty clear – or whether in fact the response that he has given is as accurately as

3305 he has suggested to this House. It may just be that the information he has been provided, he has not checked. And I am putting to the Hon. Member a set of circumstances which is suggestive of the answer not being as accurate as he may have been lulled into believing.

Hon. C P Santos: Yes. As far as I am concerned, there has been one occurrence of this. You state there was three flights. My information is there was four flights and that this only happened one time, where four flights were meant to land within two hours and we had them arriving within 35 minutes with a total load of 580 passengers inbound.

This stretched operations, but this is something that we could not necessarily avoid. These were delays for various reasons on their side from the departing airport. There are very short periods of high intensity, and then there are periods where there are no movements at all. One incident does not necessarily prove to me that we are not adequately resourced.

Whether giving passengers a bottle of water or not, I will ask about that. It is not something that I have had information on. But the original question was about the offloading of luggage. So I got the information with regard to what our procedures are with regard to luggage.

3320 **Hon. D J Bossino:** Yes, I take the hon. Member's point but I was also thinking more widely as far as adequately resourcing.

But can I just suggest to him that that he, in looking at this matter – and I would encourage him to do so in greater detail – and ask him so that I can formulate it in the form of a question that whether he will look at the arrangements which are currently in place with the luggage handler which is currently contracted by the Government to provide this service. And in that context, whether it is possible to consider greater flexibility so that we do not have a repeat.

It may only happen once in a blue moon, as he is suggesting but I think that once, and given the high numbers that he referred to in terms of offloading of passengers, it would just give a very bad impression of Gibraltar Airport and Gibraltar more widely. So I think it is important that we get this absolutely right.

3330 So the question is whether he would look at the contractual arrangements to ensure that there is sufficient flexibility so that on the ground this does not happen again.

3335 **Hon. C P Santos:** I will look into it, I imagine so, but from my discussions this has never really happened before. A lot of it is about how both carriers like BA has offloading luggage in containers, the other ones have loose. So this has been a mishap with regard to timings.

But we do not control the air spaces and the timings of departures and arrivals. It is not something that we necessarily can control.

3340 I know that on one occasion could be a very negative impression on Gibraltar. But, you know, when you look back at what has happened at the airport, Gatwick, who had to close that traffic control this weekend; and Manchester Airport, who also had to cancel flights.

I do not think this is ... I do not know the word, there is a phrase in Spanish that says "*mata un gato y llámame un mata gato*". Like if something happens once, it does not mean that this will be the reputation of the Airport. *(Interjection)*

Chief Minister (F R Picardo): A swallow does not a summer make.

Hon. C P Santos: Exactly, that is the English version of it.

3350 But I will look into it. Yes, I will discuss with my team at the Gibraltar Air Terminal and see if there are ways that we can make it even more seamless. But this is not something that seems to be a problem that has been brought to my attention before.

But yes, we will look into it.

3355 **Madam Speaker:** Next question.

Q623/2024

**Gibraltar Airport –
Plans to increase destinations to UK**

Clerk: Question 623. The Hon. D J Bossino.

Hon. D J Bossino: Does Government have current and concrete plans to increase destinations to the UK from Gibraltar Airport?

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Clerk: Answer the Hon. the Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism.

Minister for Equality, Employment, Culture and Tourism (Hon. C P Santos): Madam Speaker, we are constantly looking at increasing the amount of destinations served from the UK; and these discussions are commercial in nature and hence we are not in a position to elaborate at this time.

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Hon. D J Bossino: Just trying to ask as much information as he can provide, subject to the caveat that he has just put to us, which is that there is a commercial sensitivity at play here, which I respect and acknowledge.

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But is he – I will put it as widely as this – is there any information that he can provide? So what I am looking at is things like what destinations is he looking at? I am assuming, given that we do not yet have a deal in place – and we may never do – that we are looking at UK destinations? And in that regard, is he able to at least say which destinations are we looking at?

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Because I think there has been a drop in the number of destinations that Gibraltar Airport services. And also, if I may, whether we are looking at more than the two current carriers which service Gibraltar in terms of airlines.

Hon. C P Santos: Currently it is too sensitive where we are with regard to the deal.

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But rest assured that I am working hard on this. I cannot really give you much more information than that at the moment.

Hon. D J Bossino: The Hon. Minister says ‘the deal’. I referred to the deal, which is possibly a different deal. In other words, the post-Brexit deal. When he refers to ‘the deal’, is he saying that there is one commercial avenue that he is considering which will – and this is the purpose of my question – result in possibly greater destinations being serviced to and from Gibraltar?

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So are we talking one commercial deal that the Hon. Member is working on, and he is very keen to divulge, but is unable as a result of the strictures to which he is subject?

Hon. C P Santos: Madam Speaker, I meant ‘*The deal*’. The one and only deal. Not a commercial deal, but yes, as I have said before, I am in conversations to hopefully expand, but there are not many more details that I can give you at this point.

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Madam Speaker: All right. We have that one question outstanding, which is Question 613. Does the Hon. Member have any supplementaries? No?

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Anybody else have supplementaries on 613? All right. I think that is the end of the questions on my list.

Adjournment

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): So, Madam Speaker, this week, unfortunately, for reasons related to travel, I shall be unable to be in the House on Thursday at 3 p.m.

3400 So I therefore propose that the House should now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 in the morning when I shall be taking my questions. And thereafter, Madam Speaker, I should hope it assists Hon. Members to know that it is my intention to, on Friday, adjourn the House till Monday morning, when I intend to take the First and Second Readings of the Appropriation Bill.

I therefore now move that the House should now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 in the morning.

3405 **Madam Speaker:** I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Friday at 10:30 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Friday at 10.30 a.m. Those in favour? Those against. Passed.

This House will now adjourn to Friday at 10:30 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.00 p.m.