



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.17 p.m. – 7.33 p.m.

**Gibraltar, Monday, 30th June 2014**

## **Business transacted**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 3.17 p.m.*

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. A J Canepa GMH OBE *in the Chair*]

[ACTING CLERK TO THE PARLIAMENT: P E Martinez Esq *in attendance*]

## **Appropriation Bill 2014 – For Second Reading – Debate continued**

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia.

**Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Mr Speaker, this is my 16th contribution to a debate on the Appropriation Bill in this House, my third as a member of the Government.

5 There have been many changes to this place over those 16 years. Some have been physical changes to the building, like the introduction of air conditioning and the refurbishment of the Chamber itself; other changes have been of substance to the rules, the procedures and the practices of the House.

10 I can remember, when I was first elected in 1999, that the *Hansard* of the previous year's Budget was not available to me immediately. As the House knows, *Hansard* is now published and circulated on the Parliament website quicker than it has ever been before – indeed, there was not even a website then. Even an institution like Parliament, Mr Speaker, has to move with the times. The publication of *Hansard* reflects the policy of the Government to make such information publicly available in as little time as possible. We have achieved this. The proceedings of this House are now televised. The House has been modernised and refurbished beyond recognition. This has taken into account the interests of the public, the press and obviously ourselves as its Members.

15 I want to confirm, Mr Speaker, that the next phase of the refurbishment will happen shortly. There is financial provision for this project in the estimates of revenue and expenditure before the House today. This next phase will include much needed works to the ante-room and the back-offices for Mr Speaker, the Clerk and the staff of the House. It will also include the installation of a lift, which will allow easy access for the disabled, the elderly and others into the public gallery for the first time.

20 Mr Speaker, this building was not constructed as a Parliament. It was the seat of the Exchange and Commercial Library, which had been founded in 1817 as the civilian population's response to their exclusion from the Garrison Library; but that is another story for another day. I know that the installation of a lift will be welcomed by my hon. Friend and colleague, the Minister for Equality.

25 Moving on now, Mr Speaker, to other matters, last year was the 300th anniversary of the Treaty of Utrecht. The Government organised a very successful symposium on the subject, which included speakers from Gibraltar as well as experts from abroad. I want to thank Jennifer Ballantine Perera and the staff at the Garrison Library for the superb organisation of the event.

30 This year, Mr Speaker, there will be another symposium; this time on self-determination and referenda. The intention is that another panel of speakers will analyse the subject of self-determination from different perspectives. The principle is different in application and in law, for example, in a non-self-governing territory to what it could be elsewhere. There is already a provisional list of experts that has been drawn up and I understand that invitations will be going out soon. Once again, there will be speakers from Gibraltar as well as panellists from outside our frontiers.

35 The symposium comes in a year when Scotland will hold a referendum on independence from the United Kingdom. It also comes in the year when the Catalan Government want to hold a similar referendum in order to determine their own fate. The positions of Scotland and Catalunya are very different to that of Gibraltar and this will no doubt add to the discussion.

40 Gibraltar is a Non-Self-Governing Territory. We are, Mr Speaker, in the United Nations Third International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism. It will not have escaped anyone here that the number of Non-Self-Governing Territories on the UN list has actually gone up instead of down. The UN list and removal from it is another theme for the symposium.

The symposium, Mr Speaker, has been pencilled in for mid-October and the Government is sure that it

will prove very interesting and very relevant, both from an academic, a legal and a political point of view. There is provision in the estimates for this event.

Moving on, Mr Speaker, the seminar ties in with the need that the Government has already identified to increase the political profile of Gibraltar abroad. We have already announced our plans to step up our lobbying for Gibraltar in Brussels and in Washington. The House already knows that the Gibraltar-American Council is made up of very supportive and well-connected individuals to whom we are thankful for the continuing interest that they show in Gibraltar. This is very useful work, but more needs to be done.

In this context, the Chief Minister and I met with legal and lobbying firm Holland and Knight during our visit to Washington in March. It is clear to the Government that lobbying works very differently in the United States from what it does in the United Kingdom or in Europe. Therefore, the Government has contracted Holland and Knight, initially on a six months basis, in order to drive our campaign in Washington.

A branch of the American Chamber of Commerce has now been established in Gibraltar. The Government welcomes this as a first step to increased trade links in the future. A very successful trade delegation from the United States visited Gibraltar a few weeks ago. The House knows that the Chief Minister and I were again in Washington this month for a number of political and other meetings which are designed to pursue the Government's agenda.

Mr Speaker, it is obvious that Gibraltar needs to do more in Brussels as well. The Government is looking to develop an office there based on the one that we currently operate at Gibraltar House in London. This would involve the recruitment of new staff or the redeployment of existing staff to Brussels.

We will, at the same time, continue to count on the support of Members of the European Parliament. However, the loss of Sir Graham Watson will be felt in the light of the valuable work that he has done for Gibraltar behind the scenes. The Government remains open, in this new set-up, to the idea of Sir Graham continuing to assist Gibraltar, albeit in a different way.

There is a huge amount of legislation coming through the EU pipeline, where it is essential that the Gibraltar view is heard at an early stage in order to avoid problems later on. I know that Michael Llamas and his staff at EUID, who do an excellent job for Gibraltar, will very much welcome additional resources on the ground in the European Union capital. It might even be possible to deploy officials from Gibraltar to Brussels on a rotating three-months basis, in order to create a pool of experienced public servants in the EU capital. The College of Bruges, which trains European civil servants, might also be an attractive proposition for young Gibraltarians. We will, needless to say, continue to work closely on Gibraltar issues with UKREP, the UK Permanent Mission to the European Union.

Mr Speaker, there are also more than 700 members of the new European Parliament who need to be briefed and be made aware of the issues facing Gibraltar. We had made in-roads into the Parliament before the European Elections. The base of Gibraltar supporters in Brussels is no longer made up exclusively of British MEPs. This was seen in the two votes earlier this year on Air Passenger Rights legislation and the updated Single European Sky. Hundreds of MEPs of different nationalities and belonging to different political groups supported Gibraltar. We have seen German and even Spanish MEPs take up Gibraltar-related issues over the last couple of years, particularly the queues at the border. This is a good thing and we need to build on it. To do so, we need a team of people who will be dedicated to the task.

The election of a new European Parliament in May and, later in the year, the appointment of a new Commission that has to be ratified by that Parliament, presents a number of opportunities for Gibraltar to build on what has been achieved already. This lobbying has, up to now, been co-ordinated from my office in Gibraltar. Its role has been transformed since we were elected into a hub for the gathering of data and the compilation of reports. These reports are then transmitted to the relevant entity, which includes the EU Commission in Brussels or, more recently, the United Nations in New York as well.

The House knows that a detailed dossier of statistics, photographs and press cuttings has been sent to the Chairman of the Committee of 24 and the Chairman of the 4th Committee. The objective behind this is to challenge the claim made by Spain that the Chief Minister's address to the 4th Committee last year contained falsehoods and insults. This was in respect of the border delays, the incursions at sea and in particular the shooting incident involving the Spanish Civil Guard and a Gibraltar jet-skier.

The European Commission continues to receive monthly updates of the situation at the border. This includes statistical data, video footage, photographic evidence and press cuttings. There will be another EU mission to the frontier on Wednesday of this week. Mr Speaker, I am very grateful to everyone who has been involved in this exercise. It is very important as we continue to build up our case against Spain.

The House will know that the Government has set up a website in order to monitor the frontier delays. This has proved an extremely useful tool for persons who want to cross the border into Spain. We also know that the European Commission itself uses it to monitor border flow. The website was launched on 7th December 2012, which is about a year after we came into office. In the time since then, there have been over 12 million page views. The current average stands at about one million hits per month, which equates to about 32,000 page views every day.

This system is being upgraded to a new one, using the latest available technology. This is known as the Frontier Monitoring Project (FMP). The House will see that this is provided for in the estimates. The FMP system will give up-to-date information on queuing time, flow rates and camera imaging. Historical data going back two to three years will also be available. This will allow a correlation to be made between the length of the queue and key political events that Spain may not like.

The system will allow registered users to receive information on queuing times at preset regular intervals via e-mail or WhatsApp. This means that it can be programmed to send information on the queues, for example, between five and seven on weekdays for people returning home from work. It can also be programmed to supply information on a one-off basis for someone who does not cross the border regularly. The system will give the user the optimal time to cross in either direction, because it works using the flow rate of cars across the land frontier.

The system has the capability to detect suspicious activities. This gives it a law-enforcement capability through the use of Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). Law enforcement agencies will be able to track down any particular vehicle from Devils Tower road to the frontier loop area.

It will also allow for quicker response times for traffic management purposes. The House knows, Mr Speaker, that works have taken place at the border in order to comply with the recommendations made by the European Commission. There is now a five-lane Customs area. Provision has also been made for an in-depth search area adjacent to the Customs area with incorporated car-lift facilities. There will also be an ANPR system at the commercial gates to detect all vehicle movements as well as the incorporation of security barriers and gates to better manage Customs operations in the area. This will serve as a deterrent after hours as the area will be closed off.

It is a credit to Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, that we have complied with the recommendations of the EU Commission at a time when Spain has done practically nothing. The Government trusts that this will be obvious to the EU Commission itself when they visit Gibraltar for a second time on Wednesday.

Another area which continues to be current is civil aviation. The House knows that legislation on Air Passenger Rights, on the Single European Sky II+ and the EU Aviation Agreement with Ukraine are all held up because Spain wants to exclude Gibraltar Airport from the scope of these measures. The Government will work closely with our friends in the European Parliament and with the United Kingdom Government on these issues. Indeed, the Government welcomes the position taken by the United Kingdom Government in relation to the inclusion of Gibraltar Airport in the EU civil aviation measures. This position is that the exclusion of Gibraltar Airport from EU legislation is a 'red line' for the United Kingdom. Indeed, this was spelt out at the second Aviation Policy Consultative Conference held at the Department of Transport in London in May by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport with responsibility for Aviation, Robert Goodwill MP.

Mr Speaker, the Government welcomes the continuation of that robust approach. The Government would again like to thank all the MEPs from different political groupings who supported Gibraltar on aviation issues in the European Parliament.

Some of these matters now move on to discussion between the Parliament and the Council, which is composed of the Governments of the 28 Member States. This is where the UK must maintain its position that Gibraltar Airport must be included. The House can rest assured that the Government, for its part, will continue to make a case for the inclusion of Gibraltar Airport in EU civil aviation measures.

Mr Speaker, I move on now to aviation security. Gibraltar Air Terminal Ltd, the Borders and Coastguard Agency and GibAir Handling continue to make significant progress on Aviation Security matters. During the year, as part of this process, the Director of Civil Aviation approved a new Cargo Security programme, which reflects the completely changed procedures required by the new terminal. As a consequence, GibAir Handling has been revalidated as a Regulated Agent listed on the Commission's Register of such organisations which are allowed to process air cargo.

In common with other airports in the European Union, in response to European legislation that came into effect on 31st January, the Airport has introduced new equipment capable of screening liquids for the existence of liquid explosives. At present, the equipment can only be used for certain predefined types of liquids – principally for the screening of medicines and special dietary requirements, including baby food. The European Union is shortly to discuss the use of the equipment for other liquid types.

Mr Speaker, in this year's Budget there is an allocation of £150,000 set aside to improve security measures on Winston Churchill Avenue in order to stop cars from being able to enter the runway while aircraft are operating from it. The current preventative measures have been in place for a number of years and have been assessed as being in need of upgrading with modern barrier systems.

Mr Speaker, during the bird management audit of the Airport, it was recommended that responsibility for the bird control system on the roof of the air terminal should be passed from GATL to the NATS bird management team. A fibre-optic cable linking the terminal and ATC has now been put in place in order to make this happen.

Over the past year, GATL has continued working to enhance the air terminal's operational capabilities and improve the passenger experience. A new stand was opened for the parking of general aviation aircraft at the eastern end of the present stand. This will permit more aircraft to use the Airport. The extra parking will allow this part of the business to develop further without the previous constraint caused by the commitment to stand allocation for the regular scheduled services.

The old air terminal has now been demolished and all the remaining tenants have been rehoused in both the air cargo building and the new entry processing unit, which is located within the air terminal itself. The Government invited expressions of interest for the development of the old air terminal area on 1st March 2014.

Finally, GATL is fully engaged in updating the new Airport Emergency Orders which, once finalised, will replace the current Air Crash Response Plan.

Mr Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the many professionals involved in all the many different fields that I have mentioned for their support and assistance.

I now move on to my responsibility as Minister for Town Planning. The Development and Planning Commission (DPC) continues to discuss Government projects which are presented to it for guidance and advice. I am pleased to report to the House that the same system has now also been extended to a number of Ministry of Defence applications, at their request and by agreement with them. This is very welcome news.

The policy of the Government to place its projects before the Commission for guidance and advice has worked very well. It allows the different stakeholders to give their views on planning applications and to improve them.

The full plans and applications relating to Government projects continue to be placed online on the Government website. This gives the general public more information on Government projects than ever before. Over the last financial year, the Government's commitment to place the planning process online has continued to be developed. Once ready, it will allow the Planning Department to function and offer all its services electronically. This means that the public will be kept abreast of all applications, allowing once again for improved dissemination of information. When the system is ready, it will be possible to examine all private and Government projects online.

The Government is also in the final stages of completing the new Town Planning Act.

Mr Speaker, the Commission has been able to make its views known to the Government and the Government has listened to and acted on those views. Members will recall a number of examples of this approach. The Government decided not to proceed with an additional floor to Moorish Castle, Glacis and Laguna Estates, following the advice of the Commission. The Government also decided not to proceed with the original scale of the Sunborn reclamation in Marina Bay, which included a car park, following the advice of the Commission and the input of residents of the area. The system has therefore worked very well and many projects have been improved as a result.

The House will also recall that the Chief Secretary has written to all Government Departments, Agencies, Authorities and Companies to officially inform them that the policy of the Government is that all its projects should go before the DPC. The only provisos are serious issues of public safety, urgency or security. This system allows for inter-departmental or inter-authority consultation and discussion and for information to be exchanged between different stakeholders.

Mr Speaker, the resources of the Town Planning and Building Control Department have been increased after this Government came into office with the addition of two assistant town planners and an EO administrative grade in the Department. This last financial year, two posts were advertised following the resignation of one of the two assistant town planners and the retirement of one town planning technician. The two town planners are now involved and consulted over Government projects at the earliest possible stage, often well before a project has been officially submitted. This allows them to express their professional opinions and to have an input sooner. They also form part of the group that examines all expressions of interest in order to consider and evaluate proposals made to the Government. It will be recalled that the Department and its professional staff were totally sidelined by the previous administration.

Mr Speaker, the Opposition know that the system works better than ever before, following the reforms that this Government has introduced. Meetings continue to be open to the public and the feedback that the Government has received from applicants, objectors, the media and others continues to be very positive indeed. Many times it is standing room only at DPC meetings. On a number of occasions there have been additional special meetings dedicated to one or two applications only. Indeed, it was a historic day when the application to construct a football stadium at Europa Point was considered in public by one such special meeting. More than that, the meeting was broadcast live, given the high level of public interest in this particular application.

This reflects the policy of the Government to increase the openness and transparency of statutory bodies. It is a policy that has served to generate awareness of planning issues and to add to public debate on the matter. Discussion and debate is a good thing, Mr Speaker. This Government has come so far in such a

short time period that it is difficult to envisage that all of this used to happen in secret, behind closed doors in a boardroom in Europort, just over two years ago.

It is not only the public that has had access to the meetings. The fact that architects and project managers are often present continues to prove very useful. Most, if not all, queries can be dealt with on the spot, thereby allowing the decision-making process to be expedited. The Commission has listened carefully to countless applicants and objectors who have chosen to address it in person. It has then taken a decision with the benefit of this input and after considering the pros and cons of each application.

Mr Speaker, there were 16 meetings of the Development and Planning Commission during the last financial year. Those meetings considered 359 applications, 86 of which were for Government projects. The details of all these applications are available online, as are the minutes, which show the deliberations and the decision in each case.

Mr Speaker, Building Control is also part of my remit. The Building Control's main duties are the administration and enforcement of the Building Regulations made under the Public Health Act by inspection of deposited plans. This is followed up with the necessary site inspections in order to determine that the works have been carried out to the approved plans and specifications.

The Town Planning and Building Control sections shall soon be able to receive fee payments at their offices. This may seem a pretty odd announcement to make. The Government intends to replace the cumbersome system that we inherited, where the public submit their papers at Building Control in Europort and then have to go to the Environmental Agency in Town Range in order to effect the payment. The new one-stop shop will make it easier for applicants.

Mr Speaker, the number of building control applications that received approval in 2013 is 497. This is a record number. There has been a steady increase from 351 in 2011 to 383 in 2012, to 497 now. A total of 177 completion certificates were issued in 2013.

I take this opportunity to thank everyone in the Town Planning and Building Control Department for the professional and enthusiastic approach that they have shown in the implementation of the policies of the Government.

Mr Speaker, I move on now to lands. During the financial year 2013-14, 28 residential properties were sold, generating an income of £9.3 million. One Government flat was also released as part of a purchase. The leases for some of the properties are pending completion, which means that the final figure might vary should prospective purchasers not complete. Some of the properties that have been sold are in the Upper Town. A number of impressive schemes have already been presented to the DPC for the regeneration of parts of the Upper Town through the refurbishment of such properties. There is now a process in place to identify the next batch of residential units to put out to tender.

Mr Speaker, there is clearly a demand for properties in the Upper Town. The Government understands that one scheme with over 20 flats sold out within hours of being marketed. There are also a number of former MOD properties that have been put out to tender. The most recent were the 16 units at Europa Pass Battery, which are expected to raise just under £7 million. This money is then committed to re-provide the MOD with new buildings in a different location. New for old. This is what the previous administration agreed to under the Lands Agreement of July 2011.

A total of £24 million will have been received from the sale of residential properties since 2012 once all pending sales have been completed. Additionally, 19 commercial premises have been allocated via tender during the financial year 2013-14 and an income of £1.2 million will have been received once all the allocations are completed.

Mr Speaker, the House will have seen that various adverts have been published inviting expressions of interest. These have covered areas such as Rosia Bay, the Northern Defences, the old air terminal site, Ragged Staff Magazine and the Eastside reclamation. All of these, except the Eastside, have now closed. The successful proposed development at Rosia Bay was selected from 16 interested parties. The successful applicant has already presented the scheme to the DPC. The expressions of interest in the Northern Defences and the old air terminal site are under consideration, and that for Ragged Staff closed on 23rd May. A total of £3 million will have been received from commercial tenders since 2012, once all assignments are finalised.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the staff of the Lands Office in Convent Place and the management and staff of Land Property Services for their assistance over the financial year.

Mr Speaker, I will now say a few words in my role as the Chairman of Gibtelecom: 2013 was again a productive year for the company. Business turnover increased year on year, giving the company a solid base from which to develop and continue to make the much needed investment in infrastructure for the years ahead.

The roll-out of the Company's Next Generation Network is ongoing, with the continued deployment of VDSL2 technology to bring superfast broadband to Gibraltar. This is being made possible through the installation of active cabinets across Gibraltar, bringing the fibre to the kerb, and consequently closer to customer premises, to facilitate higher internet speeds. I can now confirm that 95% of homes are currently

within reach of this technology, with the company reporting that it expects to complete its deployment plan by the end of the year. In all, some 50 cabinets have been or are being installed around various points in Gibraltar. I am pleased to inform hon. Members that GIBtelecom now has plans to significantly increase the broadband speeds currently available to their customers before the year is out.

GIBtelecom is also securing for itself a role as a global carrier, offering diverse communication routes and data centre services with a range of contracts extending well beyond Gibraltar. The investment in the Europe India Gateway (EIG) submarine cable is the driver for GIBtelecom's enhanced connectivity worldwide and the development of their new overseas business transporting communications carriers' traffic. GIBtelecom has recently established a technical point of presence in Marseilles, France, a major gateway for cables into Europe.

GIBtelecom completed the purchase of the Haven Building from the Government in January of this year. The building, which until recently housed the Government's Treasury and other public sector offices, has been acquired on a 150-years' lease for £5.8 million. The building is connected to GIBtelecom's John Mackintosh Square headquarters and will facilitate the expansion of the company's technical facilities in the Haven building and allow the business to house, amongst other things, its next generation communications switch that will eventually replace the existing System X exchange located in the adjoining City Hall.

Because of the magnitude and complexity of developing the next generation technology, together with re-parenting the extensive cabling to and within City Hall, this project is expected to take a number of years; but once it is done, GIBtelecom will be more in control of its own destiny and, as importantly, we will return the whole of the City Hall to its iconic status as a centre of history and governance in Gibraltar. Part of the arrangement will be for the company to eventually remove that monstrosity of a bridge between the City Hall and the Haven building that was so necessary in its day.

Mr Speaker, the Gibraltar telecoms regulator has recently awarded GIBtelecom one of three 4G mobile licences, conditional on the company being able to launch superfast mobile broadband services by the tail end of next year. The company is also progressing the roll-out of a Gibraltarwide Wi-Fi network, which will complement the existing mobile signals.

Staying with mobile services, GIBtelecom recently received approval from the DPC for the erection of much needed new mobile mast sites. It is expected that some of these sites will be operational within the next two to four months, with the remaining sites coming on line within the next 12 months. As a result of the way mobile signals propagate and the changing topography of Gibraltar due to building developments, the business needs a higher number of sites to satisfy the new lower power emission planning requirements. This is another example of Gibraltar being a leader on environmental issues and reducing our carbon footprint.

Mr Speaker, I am confident that GIBtelecom continues to be well placed to meet the twin challenges of running a business of which Gibraltar can be proud in the ultra-dynamic communications world, whilst providing an excellent customer experience. The company takes a well-rounded and balanced approach by continuing to invest in infrastructure and technology, as well as in people. I am sure that Members will agree that this is the way to ensure that society's demand for more and more communications can be met for many years to come.

I would like to conclude by paying tribute to the personnel of GIBtelecom, its staff and its management, who are helping the business in Gibraltar keep pace with the fast-moving world of communications technology.

Mr Speaker, the Government continues to deliver its programme as set out in the election manifesto of the GSLP/Liberals. This is what we were elected to do. A large number of these commitments have already been completed. Many more are in progress and others will be tackled soon.

On coming into office, we opened up meetings of the DPC to press and public scrutiny. We opened up Parliament to live broadcasts of its proceedings. Soon afterwards, we identified several plots of land where over 1,000 homes are now being built to house our people. The success of Commonwealth Park is visible for all to see. This year, we announced changes to working hours for public sector workers. We announced that the Youth Centre will again open on Saturdays. We have built and refurbished play parks for our children. Our tourist product in general and our beaches are now looking better than ever. There are new schools going up, a new power station in the pipeline and Government rented housing estates are being refurbished. There are more Gibraltarians in employment. The environmental filter is firmly in place.

This is what we promised to do, Mr Speaker, and we are doing it. In so many ways we have transformed Gibraltar. We have introduced a degree of openness, accountability and transparency into the conduct of Government that simply did not exist before, whatever the Opposition may say. We continue along the path of greater e-government in order to bring the administration closer to our people and into their homes. Having said all that, there is still work to be done. We are confident, Mr Speaker, that we will continue to deliver what we promised between now and polling day.

I take this opportunity to thank you, Mr Speaker, and to thank the past and present Clerk and staff of Parliament for their assistance and support over the year.

I would also like to thank my personal staff in No. 6: my personal secretary, Coral Schembri; PA, Ernest Francis; and Principal Secretary, Caine Sanchez.

350 Thank you, Mr Speaker. (*Applause and banging on desks*)

**Statement by Hon. Dr J E Cortes –  
Awarding of contract for Commonwealth Park –  
Comments in social media**

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Dr John Cortes.

355 **Minister for Health and the Environment (Hon. Dr J E Cortes):** Before I move into my Budget speech proper, Mr Speaker, I feel I should comment on a matter that, fuelled by an implication made by Members opposite in this House last week, has been the subject of speculation by some in what we now commonly know as the ‘social media’.

360 Mr Speaker, in supplementaries to Question 448/2014, my past connection with a firm that runs the Botanic Gardens, a connection known to the whole of Gibraltar and successive Governments for over 20 years, was presented in a way that may have implied some impropriety on the part of Government in awarding the contract for Commonwealth Park.

365 I think, Mr Speaker, that this point was answered when it was confirmed by me that I am no longer directly involved in the company and that my shares are not held in trust for me. Clearly, in the company search that they carried out and which they said they had, Members opposite will have seen that my wife was still a shareholder. This is no secret, and in fact Members opposite will have known this anyway, for I worked very closely with successive GSD Ministers as director of the Gardens. There is therefore no issue in that I ever wanted this not to be known, as I knew it *was* known. Correctly, I believe the Opposition made no issue of that, and you, Mr Speaker, moved the Oral Questions session on.

370 Mr Speaker, some contributors to the social media, who it appears also had that information – which is fine, as it is public – sought to imply that this meant that my wife, and perhaps indirectly I, had a monitoring interest in the company and therefore in the Alameda and Commonwealth Park. I made it clear in a brief statement on social media that neither my wife nor I have ever collected fees from the company and that this would continue to be the case with Commonwealth Park. The company was merely a vehicle by which to perform the work I carried out, and my wife’s continuing as a shareholder is just a sentimental link to 20 years of my life, but – I repeat – with no financial benefit.

375 The matter that remains then, Mr Speaker, is whether the situation as described in any way unfairly benefited the company in its bid for the Commonwealth Park contract. The process was not run by me, but independently by the Government’s Procurement Office. It was the board that considered the three applications and that ruled that two of these did not comply with the requirements. I was not involved in any way at that stage. In fact, I am only aware of the identity of one of the other two tenderers because they approached me since last Wednesday to assure me that they bear no grudge and do not assign any unfairness to the process leading to the outcome.

380 Mr Speaker, what we cannot have is that a group of good professionals with huge experience and many qualifications are excluded from being considered for carrying out functions which would benefit Gibraltar because I happen to have had connections with them. By implication, for example, Hassan’s would be excluded from all Government work because Members from both sides of the House still have connections with the firm.

385 I wish to assure this House, Mr Speaker, that there has been no preferential treatment given and that the process for selection of the firm to manage Commonwealth Park has been dealt with in a fair and professional manner by all concerned.

390 Mr Speaker, I should point out that a few years ago, during the time of the previous administration, Wildlife was directly given a contract for the Upper Rock, assumed responsibility for running the Scientific Authority and bird control and was repeatedly offered management of the cemetery, which it declined. This was presumably done because the Government of the time thought that they would do it well. Indeed, the Minister for the Environment at the time, the Hon. Ernest Britto, wrote to me on the day marking 20 years of the Botanic Gardens project in May 2011, stating, and I quote:

‘I want to extend my warmest congratulations to you personally and also to the staff of Wildlife (Gibraltar) Ltd on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the running of the Alameda Gardens. It is without doubt that the Gardens have seen great improvement during this time, especially the creation of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and the



general beautification of the Gardens, which is in itself a very important attraction to many visiting tourists, making a significant contribution to Gibraltar's tourist product.'

The only thing that has changed since then is my departure.

I can accept, Mr Speaker, that in politics the slightest thing will be picked on, but I can assure this House that there has been nothing in this process that can cause this House any concern.

**Appropriation Bill 2014 –  
For Second Reading –  
Debate continued**

400 **Minister for Health and the Environment (Hon. Dr J E Cortes):** And so to the main body of my speech, which will be divided into two parts.

Mr Speaker, I begin with the environment. This past year has been the consolidation of environmental thinking in Government policy and action, cascading and percolating well into the private sector.

405 On looking back and taking stock, I am at the same time as embarrassed at the huge environmental deficit Gibraltar held to the rest of the world in 2011 as I am proud of the way that it has advanced since.

I am delighted therefore to report, Mr Speaker, that this year has been yet another testimony to the unparalleled level of commitment and work in all areas of national and international environmental management which began when I took office as Minister for the Environment two and a half short years ago. *Tempus fugit* – or, to quote Virgil to the full, *fugit irreparabilis tempus* – which makes it even more  
410 important for us to dedicate ourselves fully to the task of bringing Gibraltar up to international standards in environmental governance and make up for all the lost time of the past.

Mr Speaker, Gibraltar has now firmly established itself as a leader in environmental governance within the UK Overseas Territories, a role it has long deserved and that I worked for before entering politics, but that was blocked by the isolationist policies of the former administration.

415 The success of the Government's outreach was highlighted last year in a much acclaimed report on environmental governance in the Overseas Territories – produced by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, by far the largest UK environmental NGO, and published last year – where Gibraltar ranked first in all aspects.

Not only are we leaving our mark with the Territories, but within Europe as well, as Government  
420 officials increasingly network and demonstrate our vision and working practices. Only last month, Environment officials attended a seminar in Greece, where Gibraltar showcased its marine management and contributed towards enhancing the management of Mediterranean protected areas at a European level. From a position where Gibraltar was simply not represented in these events at all, we have moved to helping mould European environmental policy.

425 The benefits to Gibraltar from these networks are tremendous. As we collaborate on exciting projects and the wider international community, we get increasingly known, recognised and accepted. Gibraltar is now working at different levels with most EU countries, either directly or as part of group forums, on a wide variety of issues, including the Habitats Directive, air quality, climate change, waste, and habitat management.

430 Scientists and officials in the Department regularly attend courses on a whole array of issues, ranging from oil-spill response to environmental law. As a scientist myself, I am all too aware of the need for continuing professional development in this field and the benefits of providing public servants with these opportunities.

435 Mr Speaker, environmental civil servants and advisers continue to be involved in discussion and decision making at all levels of Government. They not only work for me, for but for all other Ministers in the Government and are called upon by my colleagues for input and advice on a regular basis. The Department continues to work closely with law drafters at the European Union and International Department (EUID) to review existing environmental legislation and deliver improvements where possible, always with the view of providing for sounder and greater environmental management and protection,  
440 which are in the interests of all.

As I have said, Mr Speaker, Environment is now more proactive than ever before, and its staff better prepared, through resources and training, to deal with a whole array of environmental issues. By way of example, the Department now has its own diving section and is performing marine surveys and relocations in house. Officers are also on call to allow for faster deployment when dealing with a wide array of  
445 environmental problems, including oil spills and pollution incidents. This complements the excellent work already being done by the Environmental Agency.

We have also enhanced the number of staff in the environmental feedback section to allow for an improved service to the public and will shortly be releasing a new app called Fix my Street, an online reporting facility which provides direct contact with Government Departments and agencies for the reporting and resolution of municipal service requests. Citizens will be able to submit service requests relating to a variety of issues, including abandoned vehicles, pollution, domestic refuse, graffiti, potholes, sign damage, stormwater drains, street cleaning, street lights etc.

In order to ensure that environmental governance is public servicewide, a seminar with all Government Departments to ensure the successful adoption of the newly revised Environmental Action and Management Plan is planned for September/October. This document exemplifies this Government's commitment to environmental change in Gibraltar and the Department is tasked with ensuring its successful implementation throughout the public service.

The Green filter continues to drive through Government activity. One of the biggest success stories in this respect, Mr Speaker, continues to be the Government's green procurement policy. By applying and directing the public sector's purchasing power within the local market towards green alternatives, we are now finding that these are not only more widespread and easily accessible to the consumer, but that increasingly they are available at a lower price than the non-environmental alternatives, and more and more local businesses are moving into the environmental sector with the products and services they offer. This just goes to show what can be achieved when Government leads by example, and is one of several clearly emerging successes that resulted from the inspirational Thinking Green Conference address by Vice-President Al Gore in October 2012.

Representatives of the Environment Department are present in any cross-departmental committee which may be set up, as well as in the Government's Projects Committee. The Department leads in committees such as the Environmental Noise Steering Group, the Energy Efficiency Committee, the Litter Committee and the Climate Change Forum, all of which I chair.

We have recently created a Climate Change Task Force, chaired by the Deputy Chief Minister, which meets on a monthly basis and, significantly, includes key stakeholders from the private sector and the Financial Services Commission. The aim, Mr Speaker, is to deliver tangible changes within Gibraltar on energy efficiency, climate change and decarbonisation: in essence, to deliver Gibraltar's 2020 Climate Strategy and overarching climate goals.

Environment has also been key in the creation of a co-ordination committee across technical departments in order to increase co-operation and efficiency in delivering Government projects.

Mr Speaker, the extremely successful recycling initiative continues, and further bins have been purchased and will be deployed in coming months. The numbers of blue, green and yellow bins will be increased in the town area, as well as in MOD estates and other locations in Gibraltar. Further expansion to the recycling initiative includes more pink bins, which cater for the recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment; and, for the first time, the deployment of orange bins to cater for the recycling of waste cooking oil. The recycling of paper, small items of waste electrical and electronic equipment and batteries from all Government Agencies, Authorities and Departments, which commenced last year, continues with 52,061 kilos collected from the public sector alone in the financial year 2013-14.

Promoting awareness is vital for the successful implementation of any environmental initiative. With this in mind, the recycling campaign has been enhanced to capture the recycling of further waste streams – namely paper and waste electrical equipment.

Mr Speaker, in 2013, the yellow bins used for cans, plastic and tetra brick collected a total of 70,720 kilos; a 383.7% increase from the previous year. The Green bins, where we deposit glass, collected a total of 153,248 kilos in 2013; a percentage increase of 21%. The blue bins, used for paper and cardboard, collected 132,495 kilos, with a massive percentage increase of 3,617%. The pink bin programme commenced in 2013 and collected a total of 1,113 kilos, with only six bins so far around Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, if these figures do not illustrate a success story, I simply do not know what will – a success story which would not have happened without the political will and foresight of this administration, and without the support of the general public, who deserve to be praised for assisting Gibraltar as it moves towards achieving the EU recycling targets. Mr Speaker, two years ago, all you could recycle in Gibraltar was tins and glass.

The refurbishment of all refuse-holding facilities has continued, with six refuse cubicles being completed this year and 15 in the pipeline.

The Gibraltar Waste Management Plan was updated this last year to reflect the Government's policy on waste management and was submitted to the EU.

The waste tender is going through its technical assessment. In respect of waste, Gibraltar is set to receive technology that will transform the way we deal with our rubbish.

The Litter Committee continues to meet on a regular basis and the improvements as a result of the work of this Committee are evident throughout Gibraltar, with the enclosure of the refuse quarry being but one

example. With the Litter Committee, we are studying ways in which to make our streets cleaner, especially those areas where historically there have been accumulations of rubbish, especially at weekends.

Mr Speaker, there is still more to be done, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Committee, especially those from outside the public sector who give of their time, for all their hard work and dedication. It really is a pleasure working with them, even though we spend most of our time talking rubbish!

Other waste and litter-related initiatives include the addition of signs to litter bins on dog fouling, the incorporation of ash trays to litter bins and an extensive CCTV programme in hotspots – areas of dog fouling and waste dumping.

Working with NGOs continues and regular meetings take place with both Government officials and with me. We have now expanded the process of involvement and transparency, and not only meet with the established environmental NGOs but also with other groups and individuals who work and contribute towards improving Gibraltar visually through cleanliness and who focus on waste and litter.

Mr Speaker, Government remains committed to involving the wider Gibraltar in its work. My Ministry now engages with more local groups than ever before and liaises with the public on a whole array of issues, directly and indirectly related to the environment. My doors are never closed to any such group.

Regular meetings continue to be held with the Scientific Authority and the Nature Conservancy Council, who are working closely with the Ministry and Department on a variety of issues relating to nature conservation and habitat management.

I mentioned last year the work of the Department with the GFSB and Chamber of Commerce on varying issues of environmental concern. As a result of this, a green seminar was held by the Department on sustainable construction. It was extremely well attended and more seminars are being planned in order to tackle other issues, such as sustainable tourism.

Mr Speaker, we have made history this year. Not only has the Government signed a power purchase agreement for wave power, which has already seen Gibraltar thrust firmly into the renewable energy scene, but I am delighted to announce that last month, for the first time in the history of energy generation in Gibraltar, 90 kilowatt hours of solar energy were fed into the local network. Additionally, data on energy savings are being collated as a result of the solar panels on the GSLA swimming pool and the tercentenary sports hall. To put matters into perspective, based on the data and savings thus far, the projected annual savings to Government from the swimming pool alone is £103,789. Further projects on solar power are currently underway at St Bernard's Hospital and Tangier Views. Work is continuing in the Department to identify further sites for the development and deployment of renewable technology, and we are in discussion with several providers. We look forward, during the course of this year, to announce further solar power projects. We will also be continuing our work to assess the viability of marine current energy as a supplier of electricity.

This is, Mr Speaker, clear evidence of our commitment to delivering a sustainable Gibraltar. May I remind the House that before this Government came into administration, there had been absolutely no progress made nor any interest shown in such matters, with Gibraltar trailing badly behind the rest of Europe. The actions and initiatives being delivered by this administration have enabled a wide range of possibilities to become available in Gibraltar, with Environment working horizontally across the full breadth of the public service to deliver economic prosperity with environmental protection and social justice.

This past year has seen a concerted effort in raising awareness of a whole array of environmental issues through the media. Some of you may have watched some of the episodes showing on GBC on the work carried out by the Department in respect of World Environment Day. More programmes will follow, focusing on other aspects of the environment.

But this is not all. We have moved into the 21st century and have taken the raising of awareness to a new dimension, using technology and current trends to facilitate active learner involvement in the local environment. What is hugely significant about this strategy is that through the use of android and iOS, we are also spreading awareness to the world at large. We have seen the launch of the Gibraltar wildlife jigsaw. Today, as I speak, we are launching a recycling game, and soon we will see a macaque augmented reality application, the Upper Rock multi-functional app and the Gibraltar interactive wildlife encyclopaedia. The Thinking Green website now has a kids' zone, which will be developed further and expanded upon in coming months. All of these portray local environmental resources, which children not only from Gibraltar but now from all over the world can download and learn about as they play.

Mr Speaker, this year, Government celebrated the 10th anniversary of World Environment Day. The purpose of this United Nations Environment Programme Day is to spread awareness of centre-stage environmental issues. This year's theme is particularly well suited to Gibraltar, being climate change in small island states, with the slogan 'Raise your voices, not the sea.' And I must say the children did exactly that: their message showed through louder and better than ever before.

As Minister for the Environment, and someone who I think has always tried to keep in touch with the youth, it is the most inspiring part of my work to see that the message really does get across and that we are succeeding in ensuring that tomorrow's generation, tomorrow's political leaders, public servants and business entrepreneurs, are growing up with this environmental awareness – which means, Mr Speaker, that finding solutions and assuming their environmental duty of care will form a natural part of their lives. The work done by children, teachers and parents has to be praised. I must also praise my Department, whose unwavering efforts with schools and other youth groups in recent years has really brought the message home.

Mr Speaker, this year finally saw the launch of the Government's Geoportal, an interactive map of Gibraltar produced by the Technical Services Department together with the IT department and Environment. The GIS database consists of a series of layers that can be overlaid to provide information on spatial patterns. The IT department has been monitoring usage, and since 19th March the map has been viewed and utilised from right across the globe: as far east as China; as far south as Mozambique and New Zealand; the extreme north, including Finland and Canada; and to the west, reaching Los Angeles in California. It has been used on mobile devices and a whole array of operating systems and web browsers. The average usage is 14,825 server requests per day. So not only are we providing an interactive map with valuable information online, ranging from streets and buildings to natural areas and geology; it is clear that people all over the world are interested in what Gibraltar is all about. This service will continue to be updated and further information is being added regularly.

Mr Speaker, the GIS project had been stumbling without political leadership or indeed interest for years, and since this administration took over it has progressed unrecognisably. (*Banging on desks*)

Another exciting development last year, Mr Speaker, was the UK Overseas Territories GIS conference. It was a resounding success and Gibraltar once again led by example and is taking a very active role in the development and deployment of GIS across the Territories.

Moving on to energy and climate change, Mr Speaker, I ask that you forgive me if I appear overly enthusiastic, but again progress, determination and success are very much the name of the game.

The Government continues with the programme to replace public lighting and street lights with solar-powered devices and/or LEDs. Data on energy, and as a result cost savings, are being collated by the Gibraltar Electricity Authority and are very encouraging. Going green certainly pays off.

Furthermore, as part of our efforts to mitigate and contribute towards the global fight against climate change, the Department is working hard to ensure that we fulfil our obligations under the various energy-related EU directives. To this end, we are working closely with AquaGib and the GEA to start the roll-out of smart meters. These will allow people to see their energy usage differently and make changes to save on consumption and money. Bills will also take on a new format, allowing householders to compare usage in one month from previous years.

Energy efficiency and reduction, decarbonisation of the economy, energy audit and the launch of renewables are the order of the day. We are spearheading Gibraltar into the international arena as we seek to form part of initiatives such as the Covenant of Mayors, Green Cities and the Local Governments for Sustainability initiative.

Mr Speaker, since I spoke last year, the evidence for the global and local risks of climate change has deepened and strengthened. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 5th Assessment Report was released in September. Its conclusions were starker and more certain than in any previous report. In its summary for policymakers, it states:

'Warming of the climate system is unequivocal....The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased.'

Mr Speaker, we cannot afford to ignore this issue, which is storing huge risks and threats for established order on our planet for our children and grandchildren. Along with the rest of the global community we need to de-carbonise our economy. Failure to do so will leave future generations to pick up the costs and the insecurity which climate change will bring. We must play our part in both mitigation and adaptation. It is for these reasons that last year I reported our ambition for Gibraltar's climate change strategy to make us a top five city in environmental governance. I am pleased to report that huge progress has been made on many fronts, moving our manifesto commitment to make Gibraltar carbon neutral from ambition into action.

In October of last year, an internal review of our climate change strategy and commitments endorsed a recommendation to deliver carbon neutrality by 2020 at the latest, ahead of any other city in Europe. To reiterate a few of the actions we have already taken to reduce carbon emissions: our plans are well advanced to build a new gas-powered power station, which will simultaneously deliver energy security and much lower emissions, as well as improving air quality; our renewable energy projects; a range of energy efficiency measures; and the invaluable and ground-breaking work of the Climate Change Task Force.

The Climate Change Forum, which continues to meet, will this year deliver a revised climate change programme as a result of the work being carried out by the task force. The work and remit of the task force include assessing and finding the most effective ways of implementing the Gibraltar climate change strategy for 2020 and beyond. By incorporating private and public sector stakeholders, the task force is well placed to find ways of implementing the findings of the research being conducted in providing an economic assessment of the decarbonisation options for Gibraltar; a renewable energy strategy; supporting the delivery of an energy efficiency action plan and building renovation strategy; a city level inventory of greenhouse gas emissions; and a climate change strategy for the transport sector.

The focus of this administration, Mr Speaker, is to work hand in hand with the community and all facets of the private sector to deliver this very inspiring change and ensuring Gibraltar truly becomes a top green city.

One of the major conclusions from our strategy review is that climate change is as much an economic issue as an environmental one. Avoiding compliance costs is another powerful argument for actively reducing our emissions.

A second conclusion is that we can make progressive climate change actions a long-term economic opportunity rather than a cost. The example of the GSLA swimming pool is a classic example, even if small for now, which in addition to the £103,789 of cost savings I have already highlighted, is eliminating nearly 18,000 tonnes of carbon emissions from our atmosphere every year.

To give more figures, Mr Speaker: despite the fact that there are more areas of public lighting, the change of some areas to lower energy systems has meant that, for the first time, energy consumption in street lighting fell from 1.81 million kilowatt hours in 2012-13 to 1.74, resulting in a small but significant saving of several thousand pounds. This is just the beginning. Other changes in light fittings in public buildings and public areas are resulting in energy savings of up to 90%.

We have also concluded that in the lifespan of this Parliament we will introduce a range of incentives for all parts of our community to adopt lower carbon lifestyles and business practices. The Chief Minister, in his address, has announced some of these incentives.

It is obvious, Mr Speaker, that making massive reductions to our carbon emissions will take many years; and even when we have made all the viable technical, social and economic investments to reduce emissions there will still be residual emissions which we cannot eliminate – for example, in transport fuels. We are reviewing how these emissions can be offset and are looking toward working with other countries to this effect. The most important point to make here, Mr Speaker, is our collective drive and determination to ensure success, and I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all members of the task force for their work and dedication to delivering this vision for Gibraltar.

In terms of energy performance of buildings, the Government is currently completing a building renovation strategy which will set new cost-optimal levels of energy performance for new buildings and existing buildings, as well as defining nearly zero energy building standards as we move towards 2020.

On water quality, Mr Speaker, both coastal water quality and bathing-water monitoring programmes continue to be in operation, and these are spearheaded by the Department of the Environment and the Environmental Agency respectively.

New initiatives that have been incorporated into the former programme include carrying out a comprehensive chemical monitoring investigation of marine biota in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters, targeting both fish and bivalve mollusc species. This initiative will serve as an excellent medium to long-term indicator of pollutant levels in Gibraltar's marine environment. It is now possible to say that the Department of the Environment is monitoring most, if not all, marine environmental components – namely coastal water, sediment and marine biota. In addition, the Department has also commenced the development of a marine litter campaign, which includes monitoring the incidence and composition of marine litter.

Groundwater quality monitoring also continues to be carried out by the Department in the Northern Isthmus aquifer and also within the bedrock aquifer underlying the Rock of Gibraltar. The results generated from the coastal groundwater programmes will shortly be used to inform Gibraltar's second River Basin Management Plan in line with the requirement of the European Union's Water Framework Directive. Results will also be used to inform reporting requirements under other directives, such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In order to improve coastal water quality within the harbour, the Department of the Environment, together with the Technical Services Department, is currently pursuing the development of one-way flow culverts which could help improve coastal water quality in specific areas within the harbour.

New EU compliant beach signs have now been developed by the Department of the Environment, together with the Environmental Agency and the Gibraltar Tourist Board, and these will be installed this year. The signs will provide the public with easily accessible information on the characteristic of each beach in Gibraltar, along with further information on the results of the water monitoring programme.

I must also pay tribute to the hard work of the staff of the Environmental Agency, who have also been working tirelessly to deliver change and environmental improvements within their areas of competence.

Examples of their efforts include the following: introduction of the Environmental Agency app (GibEnviro), catering for news, location of recycling points etc; a presence on Twitter and Facebook; the upgrading of their website; the introduction of a ship sanitation certificate service as from July; increased monitoring and enforcement on waste storage and disposal sites; increased inspections of trans-frontier shipments of waste; the provision of specialised waste management training; an expansion of the portfolio of courses run by the Agency; agency staff are, for the first time, trained to audit dental clinics, vet clinics and other premises, using X-ray under the Ionising Radiation Regulations 2004 – up to now, these were not monitored and so presented a risk to the public; inspections for the first time of hotels, guesthouses and holiday lets for general hygiene and cleanliness, health and safety, swimming pool quality etc; the encouragement of small business initiatives by the issuing of hawkers' and pedlars' licences, which this Government has reactivated; the expansion of anti-dog fouling campaigns to include talks at schools, poster competitions and CCTV cameras.

Mr Speaker, works on the improvement of the cemetery continue and a tender for the landscaping and general maintenance of the North Front Cemetery has been published and is in progress. Furthermore, the Cemeteries Board now meets on a monthly basis and I will be meeting with them in the very near future to discuss improvements to their role, advice, areas of concern and general management of all of the Gibraltar cemeteries.

Urban renewal is one of the responsibilities that falls within my portfolio, Mr Speaker, and it is proceeding apace. In this, it is often the work of other Ministries and Departments, notably Housing, Technical Services and Education, that through their own activities form the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that come together to reveal the final picture. And so the works in the estates, like Laguna, Glacis, Moorish Castle, Red Sands and the new Upper Town schools form part of this unprecedented boost to renewing our fair city. And so do other works that you will have seen around the town, including for example Joshua Hassan House and Duke of Kent House. The Upper Town street projects tender has been awarded and will see work commencing soon. These have all generated great interest from the private sector and more and more Upper Town properties are being refurbished, with plans that include a small hotel. Movement in this sphere is absolutely unprecedented in Gibraltar.

In addition, I have formed a committee, which involves the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, with the aim of identifying sites within our urban areas that require work and investment, with a view to encouraging refurbishment before demolition becomes inevitable through dereliction.

Mr Speaker, between February 2013 and April 2014, we planted 212 trees and worked extensively on the maintenance and improvement of green areas.

What better showcase, Mr Speaker, of the value of green areas and the benefit they bring both environmentally and socially to the community, can we have than the recently inaugurated Commonwealth Park? The Park, yet another success story, is being enjoyed by the community as a whole, both young and old, and it has probably been the most drastic and beneficial change to its urban fabric that Gibraltar has ever seen. (*Banging on desks*) (A Member: hear, hear) Commonwealth Park has added a new dimension to Gibraltar; a dimension that those without vision seem not to even have realised existed. Mr Speaker, the hounding by the Opposition during the construction of the park was epic: 'When will it be ready? Will it be ready? Why did the trees come from *there*? How many lorries did you use? How much will it cost?' Cynicism at its worst – which reminds me, Mr Speaker, of Oscar Wilde's definition of a cynic as being a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Mr Speaker, Commonwealth Park was an example of collaboration with other entities – in this case, the public-spiritedness of the Kusuma Trust – of effective utilisation of European Union Funds, of the use of local resources – with the soil being manufactured in Gibraltar – recycling, and of the use of environmentally friendly technology. The benefits to health and well-being will be felt by the community in a way that simple statistics will not reveal for many years, but which everyone already realises.

Already we have announced a new, albeit smaller, town-square type park in Governor's Parade, an extension to the landscaping soon to be completed in the area. Gibraltar needs to be green in colour as well as in philosophy. And, Mr Speaker, I can confirm that work on setting up two dog parks in Gibraltar – one in the north and one in the southern districts – is about to commence.

I will now move on to the subject of the Gibraltar Nature Reserve. Mr Speaker, the Department is working tirelessly with the Gibraltar Tourist Board, the Department of Education and others, on a whole array of projects which will improve the Upper Rock for tourists, the tour and transport operators who make a living from the area, and residents alike. In doing so, we are conscious of the millions of pounds that the Upper Rock has, through the years, contributed to the Gibraltar economy, the fact that it is a major tourist destination and the fact that many residents are now choosing to stay in Gibraltar rather than crossing into Spain and are looking for more things to do here.

Already, this spring, we reopened the Princess Caroline's Battery area to the community after many years, and we provided picnic tables and seating. That is nothing at all compared to what we have planned. It will be nothing short of a complete transformation and revitalisation of this too-long-forgotten national

gem and tourist product. Visitors to the Upper Rock will feel almost as if they were walking in the sky. We are reopening and improving existing trails, improving way-finding and delivering thematic routes; enhancing recreation areas and facilities, improving safety and accessibility, thereby catering for different interests. We are restoring and preserving historic structures, delivering improved interpretation and re-opening areas to the general public. We are protecting the flora and fauna, improving the habitat for macaques, reintroducing or enhancing the populations of key species, ensuring better definition of public paths and educating visitors and residents on our natural heritage. We are delivering interpretation centres, which will benefit not only local education but the eco-tourism experience as well, better signage, enhanced maps and guides, and of course interactive apps on the Upper Rock. And the Upper Rock Management Plan will ensure continuous maintenance, preventing vandalism and litter and promoting continuous improvements.

Moving on to the area of habitat management, Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report that great strides continue to be taken in the fields of terrestrial and marine habitat management. The Department is working closely with local interest groups, pulling on local expertise and experience in such projects as the Gib-Bats project, fish tagging, removal of invasive species, preservation of existing species through the provision of swift boxes and bat boxes, sea-grass restoration, species relocations, reef surveillance and enhancement, the development of an exciting reintroduction programme which will commence with the Barbary Partridge and will see other species of flora and fauna in coming months.

The existing surveillance monitoring programme will continue to be enhanced this year to ensure greater data capture for species of flora and fauna of local and European interest. Interpretation signs showcasing particular species of flora and fauna have gone up around Gibraltar and more will follow. These have included the cemetery, the Upper Rock, Europa foreshore and Windmill Hill, amongst others. They will serve to educate the public on important species found in Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker, we have been working very hard indeed to reverse the historical effects of lack of proper management of the Barbary Macaques of Gibraltar, which has resulted in our monkeys becoming regarded more as a nuisance than as an asset. Part of the management strategy is to help the public regain their traditional affection for these unique mammals with which we share the Rock, and once again to be proud of their presence and their legendary significance to the status and even sovereignty of our country. The recently launched video clip, explaining some aspects of their behaviour and how we can help, is one example of how we intend to do this. The Department and the Tourist Board is bringing in local expertise in developing a full-blown education campaign, something which I greatly welcome.

The creation of additional foraging areas on the Upper Rock by clearing dense scrub continues to great effect. Work continues too on the Upper Rock on building new ponds and enlarged feeding sites. These works are all aimed at providing as much potential activity as possible on the Upper Rock, where up until now dense scrub greatly reduced the areas they could use. The busier they are on the Rock, the less likely that they will move down into urban areas.

The ground-breaking research carried out last year together with the University of Notre Dame has shown how the macaques move widely, with successive sightings of macaques in different areas in fact being of the same individuals who are moving around. This was most useful in confirming, for example, that the group that was frequenting Laguna was in fact made up of the same individuals that would visit Catalan Bay. This helped inform the decision that it is this group that will be the main component of the animals that will be exported. Preparations are progressing well on this initiative, both in Gibraltar and at the receiving location, and details will be released in the coming months.

The enclosure of refuse facilities in macaque hotspot areas continues. Deployment of additional keen and resourceful personnel to patrol built-up areas has also helped in improving the situation, as has the deterrent of the introduction of fixed penalty fines. There is much still to do, as nature takes its time in responding, but I am confident of huge improvements in the situation this coming year.

Mr Speaker, the politically mischievous, or politically ignorant, or simply those who mean us harm, tried very hard to blame the current Spanish Government's abuse of power at the frontier on the legitimate creation of an artificial reef in our territorial waters. The huffing and puffing over, the north-west artificial reef, despite the tampering, is an example of habitat creation and encouragement of the improvement of marine life in our waters. Already there is evidence of its success, and plans to further enhance the area by the introduction of the sea grasses that once formed an underwater meadow there but that were raked away, are advancing. Other environmental improvements include the new groynes and breakwaters at Sandy Bay, already teeming with life. In this context, and following a wide range of discussion with stakeholders, regulations to govern marine activities in Gibraltar waters, while enhancing our fish stocks by investing in sensible regulation, will be published very soon.

Mr Speaker, much needed improvements to the enforcement of environmental laws are progressing well. There are currently two officers filling a new role of Environmental Enforcement Officer. They have received the necessary training from the RGP and the Attorney General's Chambers to allow them to fulfil their roles. Their areas of competence now include the enforcement of the Nature Protection Act, the Public

Health Act, the Litter Act, Animals and Birds Act, and the Seashore Rules, and include the ability to issue litter tickets and fixed penalty tickets for feeding macaques. The section co-ordinates a programme of CCTV cameras in hotspot areas of fly tipping and dog fouling.

In the area of environmental noise, we have met and will continue to meet our EU obligations under this legislative regime, and in January 2014 Gibraltar submitted its updated Noise Action Management Plan after a period of public consultation. The Department of the Environment and Environmental Agency are now reviewing the Plan through the reconvened Noise Core Steering Group, a group that had ceased to function under the previous administration.

The Gibraltar Air Quality Monitoring Programme continues and informs the Government on local air quality and management. Gibraltar achieves compliance with virtually every pollutant measured under the requirements of the Air Quality Directive and work continues to ensure compliance with all pollutants in the coming years. Gibraltar will this year be investing in new equipment for monitoring stations to ensure that the quality of data collection is maintained.

Weather stations have now been set up around Gibraltar. These will provide the Government with detailed meteorological data to support its air quality programme and to assist with plans to develop climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes. Government has also commissioned a road traffic air modelling study to support the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan.

Mr Speaker, the transition from a Gibraltar where it was a struggle to convince the Government of the importance of the environment to one where Government leads is hugely evident and hugely significant, and it can only be good for the community and for Gibraltar's international standing – and it is attracting attention both within Europe and, as is increasingly evident, in the USA.

The best thing about this, Mr Speaker, is that the new way of doing things is finding its way into all levels of our society, schools, workplaces, businesses large and small, and the public service. This is lasting change of which we are proud; and proud I am of my hugely committed staff in the Department, under our new and dynamic CEO, Dr Liesl Mesilio-Torres, and in the Ministry, of our contractors in the Agency and other entities, including Government Departments and Authorities, for responding so well to the call of the Environment. I honestly, deeply and truly am appreciative of all that you do and I greatly enjoy working with you.

Mr Speaker, I did say that I was dividing this speech into two. I just hesitated, considering the imminent, I assume, arrival of Mr Lidington, but I am told that I can continue. With your permission, I will have another sip of water.

I now turn my attention to the Ministry of Health and the Gibraltar Health Authority.

Mr Speaker, some people were sceptical about our resolve to improve current services, implement new ones and increase access to treatments; sceptical about our ability to make changes at the top, which would be reflected in improvements at all levels. All can see that, although there is a great deal still to be done, we have made very significant progress and I assure this House that we continue to be determined to complete this process.

*Fugit irreparabilis tempus*, to use the quote from the Georgics again, Mr Speaker. But just like a newly transplanted tree invests in its first years in developing its roots, fooling the observer on the surface by the limited growth of its branches and leaves, only to burst into a frenzy of new life once the roots are firmly established, so too be aware that, the groundwork done and the teams and processes in place, we are just about ready to go.

Mr Speaker, after two and a half years in office, I continue to have an open approach to improving the Health Service. I continue to meet staff, service users, pressure groups, charities and other organisations, which enables me to be aware of any shortfalls or gaps in the service – be it resources, logistics, space, access to services – like GP appointments or waiting times, like at the Accident and Emergency Department. I encourage those with concerns about our services to come forward and make them known. Knowing about them enables me and the GHA to address them and deliver a Health Service to be proud of and one that meets the needs of our people.

Since my last presentation to this House, a solid foundation continues to be laid for the achievement of our goals and the manifesto commitments that we have set ourselves. Mr Speaker, in previous presentations to the House, I have made numerous references to the need to change the GHA's management structure, which I described as awkward and complex, with little focus on the patient or service user. Over the last 12 months, we have taken huge strides in this with the appointment of hugely experienced Gibraltarian health professional, Freddie Pitto, as the new CEO, as well as a new Medical Director, but also the appointments of the three unit general managers. The new unit managers will provide much needed leadership and unity to the three pillars of our Health Service: primary care, secondary care and mental health. The main benefits of this new management structure will be more effective and efficient management of operations, better integration of services and a seamless journey for patients and service users. The introduction of the unit managers will further assist in strengthening budgetary discipline by creating more controls and greater responsibility and accountability for the GHA's expenditure.



Mr Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity here to thank John Langan and Ernest Lima for bidding the organisation over for a year and for the support they are always willing to provide the GHA.

Mr Speaker, parallel to the restructure will be the review and formation of new groups. The GHA senior management team is being formed to replace the old, tired and ineffective GHA executive and will be tasked to deliver on our strategic objectives. The GHA operational group will form the senior management group with regard to operational delivery, the management of performance and management of risk. Together, as a team, they will have collective responsibility to ensure the most effective running of the organisation ever in order to optimise the experience of patients in our care. Additional groups will include the Corporate and Clinical Governance Group, and will address such issues as patient safety, staff training and development, audits, learning from clinical incidents and accountability, just to mention a few areas.

Early indication, from feedback collected by the new team from our users, is that they feel our Health Service needs to focus on the following key points: a shifting emphasis from cure to prevention, to include screening programmes; a Health Service planned around the health needs of the population; a Health Service which aims for consistency, safety and high quality; care which is provided by the appropriate professional in the appropriate site; reconfiguration of our services and model of service delivery with a greater shift to day care, outpatients and community services; a wider integrated approach to healthcare, with the GHA operating with other Government Departments and agencies with the aim of improving the health of our community; a Health Service which invests in staff training and development; an organisation which learns and responds to the main themes of audits, complaints and incidents; a wider use of IT to improve patient care; repatriation of services; and finally, a Health Service which is financially cost effective and operates within budget. These are in tune with our manifesto commitments and will form the basis of the GHA strategy for the coming years.

Mr Speaker, all of these key points which will form the framework of our vision, one of which will be to have a healthcare model which improves accessibility to services, focuses on quality of care, and always with strict, responsible financial controls in place to ensure a cost-effective service.

Mr Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to specific areas of our Health Service, what has been achieved and what is in the process of being introduced.

Mr Speaker, Gibraltar's childhood immunisation schedule is one of the most progressive in the world, and the programmes continue to be carried out every year in accordance with the schedule by the primary care practice nurses. Protection against disease is also available to our adult population through comprehensive and established programmes, such as the influenza vaccine. New developments in this area may soon include the introduction of the vaccination programme against shingles. This has recently been introduced in the UK, and the GHA is considering this programme since we shadow the UK's immunisation programmes.

Mr Speaker, the lack of occupational health services has been a major handicap for many years. This has resulted in situations where healthcare workers were not protected against serious infections, like hepatitis B, to which they are at risk of exposure whilst working. Gibraltar and European law is quite clear and specific on the employer's responsibilities toward workplace safety and on health protection for employees, laying particular emphasis on the role of vaccination. The risk of hepatitis B does not only affect GHA workers, but also police officers, prison officers, social workers, sewage workers and a variety of others who are exposed in varying degree to this risk due to their occupations. In order to address this immediate risk, the Government has set up a scheme, in partnership with the GHA, to immunise all Gibraltar Government employees who are at a significant occupational risk of hepatitis B. The programme was launched in March this year and was a hugely significant and well overdue service.

Mr Speaker, Gibraltar already has a screening programme in place against breast cancer, and we have this year, on the advice of our consultants and our referral centre, streamlined and improved the service.

Attention has now turned to the prevention of another major cancer: colorectal cancer. This is Gibraltar's most commonly occurring cancer, as well as the third most frequent cause of cancer deaths. The incidence is also rising compared to a decade ago. It has a high mortality rate if left undetected. Mr Speaker, the Government announced a screening programme targeted at all persons between the ages of 60 and 74 years. The Government has invested substantially in the resources and improved facilities necessary to make this a reality and make the Gibraltar programme a state-of-the-art design, superior to that of many countries. The programme was launched in February 2014. Lives will be saved as a result.

Mr Speaker, I am committed to the continued introduction of screening programmes for early detection of disease, which improves survival rates and the quality of life of our people. This is one of our manifesto commitments. The next screening programme which will be introduced is screening for abdominal aortic aneurysms. Having an aneurysm does not produce symptoms unless it starts to bleed. Early diagnosis and treatment will, once again, save lives.

Mr Speaker, priority continues to be given to the area of health promotion and public health education. We will continue to considerably amplify the productivity of the Department in meeting the standards that the public expects. Activities carried out by the Department during this past year include the following

awareness campaigns: breast feeding, immunisation, reducing obesity, colorectal cancer screening, sun awareness and dermatology.

Mr Speaker, we continue to address gaps in this Department which were ignored by the previous administration. The Public Health Department has now taken steps to halt the progressive deterioration of the quality of data of the Cancer Registry, whose fitness for purpose had been questioned in an audit report in 2009. The Department will now carry out its core data and information-based functions.

Mr Speaker, in my last address to this House at Budget time, I mentioned the publication of Gibraltar's first ever health and lifestyle survey. In the words of our Director of Public Health, Dr Vijay Kumar, every nation that desires to understand the health of its population must at some point consider carrying out a health and lifestyle survey. The information and data gathered will allow for informed decision-making and appropriate actions to be taken to improve the health and lifestyle of all of Gibraltar's people. This survey has brought insights into the health of the people in an unprecedented manner. However, the wealth of information gained will only remain useful if it is regularly supplemented and updated. To this end, the Public Health Department is planning for the next health and lifestyle survey to take place in 2014-15. Creation and successful completion of such projects highlights the commitment by this Government and the GHA to ever closer understanding of the health of our people.

Mr Speaker, I am also pleased to announce the introduction of a totally new consultant microbiology service. Medical science has changed vastly in the realm of infectious diseases in the past decade and many bacteria seen in hospital infections nowadays are resistant to antibiotics, creating an impending crisis for the future. Addressing this problem requires specialist clinical expertise in infectious disease management, which the GHA currently does not have. It is, however, planned that a service provider contract with a UK-based Gibraltarian consultant clinical microbiologist will fill this gap. The benefits of this will be more optimised treatment for patients and better management of the scarce antibiotics.

Other initiatives that we are planning include an initiative on men's health awareness and the enhancement of prostate cancer detection in collaboration with the Prostate Cancer Support Group and the Kusuma Trust.

Mr Speaker, the GHA's HR and finance staff were very busy in the latter months of 2013, co-ordinating and undertaking the administrative arrangements necessary to facilitate the transfer to the GHA of approximately 260 Care Agency staff. The most significant change to the transferred staff was that of a pay uplift, bringing their salaries in line with that received by GHA staff under the Agenda for Change (Gibraltar) agreement, which had been a commitment of the parties in Government. This required many hours of hard work, and I am grateful to the staff, both of the GHA and the Care Agency, for making this possible in record time.

Twenty members of staff from a wide cross-section of the organisation successfully completed the Learning in Action management development programme. A key element of the programme involved the completion of a work-related project which would subsequently be of value to the organisation.

Mr Speaker, the Government continues with its commitment to deliver a wide range of levels of education – including university-level education locally, be it at undergraduate or postgraduate level. I say this in relation, of course, to the School of Health Studies. Last year, I was pleased to announce the commencement of the first ever BSc Nursing adult degree programme, with 15 students being selected. We are now in the process of selecting the next group of students, who will be starting in September this year. Additional to this, we have recently introduced a postgraduate Masters programme in Leadership and Management in Health. This will provide a higher level of education for our leaders and managers.

Mr Speaker, this Government and the GHA will continue in its aspiration to respond to the needs of the people of Gibraltar through the provision of high quality, fit-for-purpose and contemporary healthcare education. Most importantly, the provision of education by the GHA is aimed at staff across the organisation, with a strong commitment to opening up professional career paths for all staff.

We have already started enrolled-nurse level training for nursing staff, and a second cohort is soon to start. This has opened avenues for entrants at nursing assistant level to be able, through hard work and commitment, to continue to progress their nursing career. Other future training programmes for our staff will include the possibility of undertaking foundation degree programmes, which will continue to develop and modernise the service provided by the GHA. For the first time ever in the history of Gibraltar, we graduated four students with a foundation degree in Paramedic Science from Kingston University. All four are now registered with the Health Care Professionals Council. The final cohort of 12 diploma nursing students graduated in November 2013 at a colourful graduation ceremony at the John Mackintosh Hall. I am pleased to inform this House that all those nurses who qualified secured employment within the GHA. Additionally, two students returned from Kingston University and St George's University of London with mental health nursing qualifications and one of them secured a first class honours degree.

I take this opportunity to congratulate all the successful students of the GHA School of Health Studies. I am pleased and proud to say that the School is also playing a key role in the ongoing work led by my colleague, the Minister for Education, towards setting up a University of Gibraltar.

In partnership with the Department of Education, we are monitoring the number of local students undertaking healthcare-related programmes in the UK in order to plan for the future workforce of the GHA.

But, Mr Speaker, the provision of education does not end here. For healthcare professionals to maintain and improve their skills and knowledge for the benefit of patient care, we have set up a comprehensive programme of continuing professional development. This is multi-disciplinary, offering modules of study for a variety of academic levels reflecting the health and care needs of the people of Gibraltar. The majority of these modules are generic in nature as we continue to encourage staff to accumulate academic credit as they work towards a diploma or degree in healthcare practice. All of this has been achieved as a result of the professionalism and commitment of the staff at the School of Health Studies and with our partners at Kingston University and St George's University.

Mr Speaker, the development and modernisation of the Gibraltar Ambulance Service continues to be a priority for this Government. We have recently appointed a new Chief Ambulance Officer, who started in his new role on 1st March 2014. As with all other sectors of the GHA, training for the Ambulance Service continues to be a priority. As previously mentioned, four members of the Ambulance Service completed their paramedic training. We are in the process of making the required changes to our legislation, and once this has been completed the newly qualified paramedics will have at their disposal the whole range of clinical interventions and drug-administration regimes which are available to their UK counterparts. Paramedic care at this level has been shown to not only save lives in seriously ill and injured patients, but also to improve the general outcomes for a whole range of other patients in the pre-hospital arena, plus they will be able to use their newly acquired knowledge and skills to support their emergency medical technician colleagues.

Mr Speaker, other training programmes have included 16 GHA ambulance staff undertaking training in marine emergencies, and the Ambulance Service now, for the first time ever, has the capability of responding to maritime emergencies in our coastal waters. Thirteen staff were trained in chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear equipment and readiness to UK standards.

Mr Speaker, the GHA's vehicle procurement plan is well underway and has already replaced the bulk of the ambulance fleet. In total, five new vehicles have arrived, which have included patient transport ambulances and High Dependency Unit ambulances. Prior to this plan, the fleet had been in a poor and dangerous condition and largely not fit for purpose, placing patients and staff at risk. I am committed to never again allowing the fleet to age to the point where almost total replacement was urgently required within a short timeframe.

Mr Speaker, the pharmacy department now has a community pharmacist who replaced many of the functions of Mr William Mito Guillem, who retired earlier this year and whom I would like to thank for his many years of service in setting up and running the Prescription Pricing and Advisory Unit (PPAU). The pharmacy department continually strives to improve the service it provides. As new initiatives, it has introduced double checks for all dispensing, with drug labels carrying two signatures; wards have greater input from pharmacists on a daily basis; and this year has seen the introduction of an emergency drugs cupboard for out of hours, which is proving very effective and allows patients to receive medication in a timely manner. Another initiative which is being explored is the introduction of patients' own drugs cabinets.

Mr Speaker, another major achievement has been the transposition of all handwritten prescriptions into the electronic prescribing record system. Huge piles of unrecorded prescriptions had been the norm in the past, a real danger to patients. I can now confirm that, for the first time ever since its inception approximately eight years ago, all handwritten prescriptions generated and presented to the PPAU are now in the system. This translates to up-to-date patient medication records and therefore increases patient safety issues. This is just one of the hidden issues that I have been discovering since coming into office. Fortunately, it has now been dealt with.

Mr Speaker, this year has seen significant improvements and updates to the pathology equipment base and laboratory information system. The majority of the biochemistry, haematology and coagulation analysers have been replaced. This will ensure that all equipment is reliable, robust and current.

Mr Speaker, we are also in the process of introducing new tests. In 2003, a NICE guideline recommended that pregnant women should be offered screening for Downs Syndrome. At present, the GHA offers all mothers-to-be a blood test at 12 weeks to screen for Downs Syndrome, but this only gives a 67% detection rate. In 2007, the NICE guidelines recommended that all women should be offered screening tests, with detection rates above 75%. The non-invasive prenatal test (NIPT) will soon become available to Gibraltar mothers. The advantage of this test – a blood sample taken at eight weeks – is that it is 99.9% accurate for detection of Downs Syndrome and will save many families from the stress and anxiety of having a stressful test – amniocentesis – which is done by inserting a needle and taking a sample of fluid around the baby and carries a higher risk of miscarriage. At present, this test is only offered in the private sector and Gibraltar will be the first ever national programme of that type anywhere in the world, and it will

be available as from 14th July to women of Gibraltar, who will have the latest and most advanced test with the least disturbance and anxiety.

1055 Mr Speaker, our aim to computerise patient notes remains as strong as ever. We are very aware of the benefits that this will bring to the service, including increased patient safety by reducing or correcting errors; improved shared decision making; more accurate and efficient transferability of records; and clinical and administrative time savings. Since 2007, the GHA identified electronic patient records (EPR) as the way forward in modernising and improving our Health Service, but the previous administration stood idle and took no notice or action on this, to the detriment of progress and of the service. This Government has  
1060 seen and witnessed the importance of this project and has committed itself fully to this initiative. I can inform this House that the GHA issued an OJEU advert on 27th November 2013, and the Electronic Health Record Programme Board, which I chair, has been set up to oversee this project and ensure it is delivered on time.

1065 Mr Speaker, in the periphery of the work being undertaken with the EPR project, other initiatives and improvements are taking place. The Information Systems Team have developed in-house clinical applications to manage various requirements for monitoring and managing patients or specific clinical initiatives. Other new initiatives are being worked on, including a new look to the existing system and a diabetic clinic system. These new systems will be integrated once the full EPR system is in place.

1070 Mr Speaker, the Information Technology Team continue to manage the GHA's computer and network infrastructure and are involved in various development programmes, such as the design and build of the new data centre, and the installation of a histopathology system, which will enable the computerisation of all results in this area of pathology services and to fully integrate with existing systems, also involved in the installation of a hospital Wi-Fi network; improvements to the virtual clustered server environment; new backup and disaster recovery systems for business continuity; and supporting other GHA projects, such as  
1075 the new mental health facility.

Mr Speaker, the GHA launched its new website and social media presence on 17th July 2013. The website was designed and developed completely in house. Since its launch in July last year, the website has received 48,506 unique visits, 158,986 page views, and the average site visit lasted for approximately five minutes. The website has also received 409 e-mail enquiries, and 164 service users cancelled their  
1080 appointments online. Prior to the launch, the previous website had received a total of 384 unique visitors, 1,983 page views, and the average visit had lasted three seconds. They can't have been very impressed with what they saw!

1085 Mr Speaker, in keeping with our manifesto commitment of making alternative arrangements to improve the delivery of meals and consequently their quality, I can inform this House that the feasibility study commissioned for the relocation of the catering facility to St Bernard's Hospital has been completed and the project is now in the construction phase. The new facility has been designed to cater for a bulk meal service; however, discussions are already underway to phase in this service as a pilot prior to the completion and relocation of the facility. Works to accumulate the bulk meals service within the wards are proceeding.

1090 On medical records, Mr Speaker, I am pleased to inform this House that the exercise to relocate all active patient medical files to the new Medical Records Library was successfully completed in December last year. This new facility will provide spacious and functional accommodation for the safe storage and retrieval of medical records and improve the working environment for staff.

1095 Mr Speaker, the sponsored patients department continues to see an increased trend in the number of patients being referred to various UK and Spanish centres for tertiary treatments, due to the fact that healthcare continues to become even more specialised and more options become available for patients. The Government will continue to support this programme, but is always mindful of exploring options for repatriation of both diagnostic and treatment services and of keeping services as close to home as possible to ensure patient and family comfort and to offer a wider choice to our people. Following on these lines, we  
1100 have formally established a service level agreement with Xanit International Hospital, which has fixed prices and provides the opportunity for tertiary referrals close to home for a wide variety of medical conditions. Discussions with other centres are also in progress.

1105 Mr Speaker, the number of referrals processed by the GHA's sponsored patients department will continue to increase. In order to ensure that the department continues to provide an excellent service, an internal review of the department and its services is currently being conducted in keeping with the Government's manifesto commitment to this effect. Changes to the conditions and allowances are being considered and will be concluded within this financial year. As an interim measure, and as from 1st August this year, the maximum allowance payable to patients and escorts staying with friends and relatives will be increased by approximately £75 a week each to equal half of the amount given for staying in rented  
1110 accommodation. This will assist these patients and their relatives, who often receive very meagre allowances.

Mr Speaker, the radiology department has been a pioneer within the GHA as regards information systems and electronic requesting. There have been ongoing developments within the field of teleradiology and patient images and reports can now be sent abroad directly through secure log-in accounts to users anywhere, anytime.

The tender for the procurement of the new CT scanner is going through due process via the Government's central procurement office and I expect it will be in place during this financial year.

Mr Speaker, not surprisingly, I continue to support initiatives by GHA management and those by the GHA's very active Environmental Task Group. The GHA continues to be proactive in reducing the environmental impact brought about by the use of its facilities and services. There are various environmentally friendly initiatives aimed at reducing energy consumption, enhancing energy conservation, recovery and the reduction of operational costs. Some of these initiatives include an LED lighting scheme, with the aim of replacing conventional lighting throughout the GHA; a smart metering solution has been recently commissioned to ensure we are able to monitor power usage throughout St Bernard's Hospital; the installation of heat recovery systems, which ensures the recovery of heat load generated from the air-conditioning system in order to provide hot water, already installed at the new mental health facility; a new solar thermal plant will be installed at St Bernard's Hospital – it is expected this plant will provide up to 60% of the Hospital's hot water, with considerable savings in fuel costs. Other projects include the introduction of recycling bins for paper and cardboard and electronic equipment.

Mr Speaker, improving mental health services remains one of our top priorities. A large proportion of the work done over the past year in mental health relates primarily to the new facility due to open this year. Through a process of discussions with a number of groups – including staff, service users, carers, support groups and relatives – major changes will be seen in the way Mental Health operates.

Among some of the improvements will be the ability to offer more appropriate placements for patients during their journey through the reconfigured facility. The new facility will also see the introduction of a variety of new services and programmes, including a sheltered employment programme in partnership with the Club House Project; an activity and recreational centre offering structured programmes; and the introduction of open-air exercise equipment in the garden to promote a healthy living initiative, linked with the Well Man and Well Woman groups. All these programmes are being developed to assist full integration into society and giving patients the opportunity for a better future.

Mr Speaker, another area which required great attention was the Community Mental Health Unit. This facility is currently undergoing a major refurbishment programme to all existing areas, which will include an extension to the existing building, which will house two extra consultation rooms and a secure area to house all the clinical notes.

Mr Speaker, when I came into office I made a promise of never again allowing the Mental Health Service to deteriorate to the level that I found it. (*Banging on desks*) I maintain this commitment, and I am pleased to inform this House that we are well on the way to having a mental health facility and service of which Gibraltar can be proud.

Mr Speaker, due to the increasing demand of services for dementia patients, resources have been reconfigured and staff have successfully completed further training in this field in order to offer more support to this client group and their families. Keeping to the subject of improving services and facilities for dementia patients and support for relatives and carers, the Dementia Day Facility Steering Group continues to work on this project with a target date for completion late this year. This group is also developing the Dementia Strategy for Gibraltar.

Mr Speaker – (*Interjection*) There is a lot more to go: we have been very busy this year, Mr Speaker! (*Interjections*)

Perhaps the biggest success story of this past year has been the opening of the new day surgery unit, with its extended opening hours and specialised staff. This unit has the ability to do more procedures as day surgery, reducing the need for overnight stay and the use of much needed in-patient beds. Most healthcare providers worldwide are working hard to implement this model of surgery as the norm for the vast majority of surgical procedures, as there are multiple benefits for the patient and healthcare provider. In the UK, around 70% of all surgery is carried out in this way and the NHS is trying hard to improve on this number. I am proud to say that the GHA's day surgery programme has revolutionised surgery at the GHA and now accounts for nearly 85%, in April, of all surgery, compared to just 33% in January 2013. I have to thank all the staff concerned, who have spearheaded the project themselves and responded to this change admirably.

Mr Speaker, the aim of the GHA's day surgery programme is not just about numbers, but about a service which follows international best practice, contributes towards a safer service and aims at improving patient and staff satisfaction and outcomes. The success of this is evidenced by the numerous letters and positive patient feedback received, highlighting its excellence.

The opening of the new Day Surgery Unit, together with the introduction also this year of the third operating theatre suite, which had practically remained inactive since the opening of the new Hospital, have been major factors in addressing some of the challenges which were being faced by the Health Service:

long surgical waiting lists in every speciality and the unavailability of hospital beds. The number of cancelled operations due to bed shortages has dropped massively since last summer, with only two cancellations during the usual difficult winter season between October and March. (*Banging on desks and interjection*) This compares to a peak of 70 cancellations in 2011-12, when the former management was in place and the policies of the previous administration lingered. The average cancellations in these months during the last winter were 0.4 per month, compared with averages of nine, fourteen and seven per month in the previous three winters. Mr Speaker, the scourge of the GHA – cancellation of operations at short notice due to lack of beds – is a thing of the past and banished to the memory of the dark days of the GSD. (*Banging on desks*)

Also significant is a drop in the number of patients waiting for surgery. (*Interjection*) Comparing April 2012 with March 2013 and March 2014, the total numbers of patients waiting were 986, 1,030 and 626 respectively. This is equivalent to a reduction by about a third in the past year. If those patients already booked for surgery are removed from the list, the total drops even further to 467, or half the figure.

Mr Speaker, even though there are still surgical specialities which continue to present a challenge, through a number of initiatives – such as increasing the visits by visiting surgeons and undertaking weekend initiatives – with the ability to use three theatres and day surgery, we will continue to improve on these figures.

Progress in other waiting lists can also be seen: for example, in urodynamics there has been a drop from 30 to 13 weeks. Even in orthopaedics – which remains the biggest challenge, due to a longstanding waiting list – the outpatient wait has dropped from an unacceptable 10 months to six months. This is still not acceptable and we are on track to resolving this in the coming year, but it shows a clear improvement over the past year.

Mr Speaker, I am proud to say that waiting lists are falling and waiting times reducing. Put another way, we have slashed waiting lists and waiting times unrecognisably. Other factors which have contributed to achieving these successes have been a more proactive management of lists and beds, and more engagement by clinicians in the direction and development of theatre activity. This is hugely significant. The clinicians, nurses, doctors and allied professionals are all actively involved in taking and actioning decisions, working with technical, administrative and support staff, from attendants and labourers to craftsmen and domestics who, as we know, keep the GHA in sparkling condition. And it works: the GHA is once again becoming a team.

Mr Speaker, I would be falling short of my duty if I did not here mention the work being done in partnership with the Care Agency in providing care packages and support in order to facilitate discharges of patients from St Bernard's Hospital. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) This is in addition to the work that has been carried out by the Care Agency again in opening the John Mackintosh Wing at the old St Bernard's site. This facility, temporarily accommodating residents of the Jewish Home, will cater for frail, elderly patients and will allow the GHA to free up much needed hospital beds, allowing it to continue its elective programme and maintain its emergency capacity with no disruptions or safety issues.

Mr Speaker, allied health professionals are an integral part of our healthcare system and have been involved in the past year in the introduction of new services, and are working to implement even more.

Keeping in line with improvements done to the GHA's waiting list and waiting times, another success story is the physiotherapy out-patient waiting list, which reached an unacceptable 400 in October 2013, following loss of staff, with a waiting time of 20 weeks. Since January 2014, I am glad to say that this initiative has yielded very positive results, with the waiting time now standing at only three weeks. The physiotherapy department, together with other healthcare professionals, have worked towards the implementation of NICE guidelines for the management of non-specific lower back pain.

The audiology department is working with the Nuffield Centre in the UK to set up a comprehensive neonatal screening programme.

The waiting list for hearing aids is in the process of being reduced.

Waiting times for orthotics and optometry are just two weeks. During 2013, the optometry department introduced a contact lens service. Apart from a few patients who need to be referred to Moorfields Eye Hospital in the UK due to the need for more specialised treatment, the majority of patients are now seen locally; this being in line with the Government's commitment to repatriate services.

The occupational therapy staff continue to work tirelessly on the backlog of environmental works which stretched back to 2007. By prioritising these works, for the first time in years this backlog has now been eliminated.

The 'Early Birds' training programme started in March 2014. This programme is jointly run by the paediatric occupational therapist and speech language therapist, and is designed specifically for parents, to help them with understanding and giving them practical coping strategies to implement at home and in school for their child with a recent diagnosis of autism. In line with our policy on autism, staff also attended the National Autism Conference held in the UK and gained excellent knowledge and skills from the workshops to ensure best practice is followed for this service. I am particularly satisfied at the progress

being made in providing support for families where autistic spectrum disorder has been diagnosed. I will continue to actively support this work and I have encouraged parents of children with autism to form a support group, with which I will continue to work.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, I continue to meet regularly with too many groups to mention separately, and will continue to work together with them to achieve greater improvements. Some of the initiatives resulting from working with these groups have included and will include the introduction of free diabetic-specific medicines for all type-1 diabetics; the introduction, for the first time, of guaranteed annual reviews of type-1 diabetics by a consultant; prostate cancer screening service; improved lymphoedema service; plans to work on sexual health initiatives; talking lifts in St Bernard's Hospital to assist the visually impaired.

Mr Speaker, I am pleased to report that after lengthy negotiations with Unite the Union, a firm proposal to resolve the issue of the consultant contract has now been put to Unite the Union, which represents the consultants. These negotiations threw up new claims, not anticipated when I reported to this House last year, which resulted in the discussions being extended. We remain committed to also review the contracts of our non-consultant hospital doctors.

Mr Speaker, in line with our manifesto commitment of making the General Medical Council (GMC) the regulatory body in Gibraltar for the medical profession, after meeting with the Department of Health and the GMC in London, we have made huge progress on this and expect soon to be in the position to implement. We have already identified the responsible officer for Gibraltar and we are in the process of drafting the necessary legislation. Further progress has been a service level agreement with Health Education England to deliver the mandatory appraisal programme for all our medical staff, which is a crucial part of the revalidation process. This will represent a massive step forward for the GHA in maintaining the skills, competency and quality of our medical staff and one which will have a lasting and positive impact on the standard of healthcare in Gibraltar. The GHA has supported its doctors in dealing with this change in practice, which has included the GMC's own moves towards a stricter licensing regime. There has been and will continue to be full consultation with doctors in both the public and the private sectors as the process is rolled out in the coming year.

Mr Speaker, an associate specialist in accident and emergency will shortly be appointed, which will improve the management and leadership of the medical team in this department, improve medical cover and hopefully reduce waiting times for patients. Together with the plan to have a 24-hour receptionist presence at A&E, improvements in this area are envisaged.

Mr Speaker, at the beginning of my presentation this afternoon, I identified that one of the problems that we continue to have is access to GP appointments. The system for the provision of advanced appointments changed in August 2013. The appointment system changed from a three-months cycle to a monthly cycle. This seems a better solution than the previous system, but I acknowledge that no system is perfect and this one is not without its problems. Notwithstanding the improvements that the new system represents, it is clear that more work is still required. Analysis of available data on patient numbers reveals an increase in the number of users eligible for the service. This increase in demand is a challenge that is being discussed with both service users and service providers.

I acknowledge, Mr Speaker, that there are complaints with regard to lack of access to services by telephone, especially at peak times of the morning. I take these concerns very seriously and attempts continue to be made to improve access to services. The problem is largely due to the large number of persons who phone in over a short period. Even though there are lines in use and 60 callers get a recorded message, the system as it stands gives the impression that from the 61st caller that the phones are either off the hook or not attended. I assure you that this is not so, and I pay tribute to the staff at the Primary Care Centre for their commitment and hard work in challenging circumstances. We continue to work on these issues.

Ongoing developments to help improve the service include extra phone lines; booking appointments through the internet; further improvements to the repeat prescription system; texted appointments now introduced for those with sensory impairment; analysing further the GP workload; exploring different models which may change the way appointments are offered with the aim of improving the quality of the GP-patient interaction and increasing the availability of GP appointments.

Other developments which will improve the current services include the following: Extra clinics are currently being constructed, which will ease the pressure of clinic space felt by all clinicians. Specific children's clinics will very shortly be introduced, and nurse practitioners who are now able to prescribe from the full formulary. All of these developments will result in the problems experienced by the public in accessing primary care becoming a thing of the past.

Mr Speaker, the GHA's hard facilities management services are provided through the Estates and Clinical Engineering section, which is staffed by staff seconded from the Gibraltar Electricity Authority. This covers the GHA's substantial estate across multiple sites. The team is responsible for planning and co-ordinating major works, many of which I have already mentioned. Engineering and maintenance support is

provided for the estates' engineering infrastructure as well as the maintenance, repair and calibration of medical plant, clinical equipment and medical gases.

Mr Speaker, the Estates and Clinical Engineering team attended to a total of 1,892 breakdown and repair requisitions and 459 after-hours call outs. This represents a fall of 7% over the previous year. Their hard work and commitment sees the GHA's premises function with a high degree of excellence and has reduced the backlog of servicing and commissioning to zero.

Last year, the Government maintained the GHA's substantially increased capital expenditure funding. This has allowed the GHA to develop important projects necessary to improve facilities and continue to make progress with its medical equipment life cycle replacement programme, which ensures that our clinicians are supported with modern technology that is now an integral part of healthcare delivery. This investment in capital for the Health Service will continue this year.

Mr Speaker, I will now wrap up by mentioning a few ongoing initiatives which have seen recent progress or which you will see during the coming year.

Mr Speaker, building an extension into the surrounding grounds will expand the area available for patients in cardiac rehabilitation, physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

For the first time in over 20 years, a Medical Advisory Committee has been set up, made up of the doctors and dentists in the GHA. This is a manifesto commitment and essential in enhancing clinical involvement.

The pathway for stroke care is at present being developed by a steering group of healthcare professionals under the direction of a specialist stroke consultant from the UK. This pathway will introduce the use of new technology, which will transform the way healthcare is provided in Gibraltar. Telemedicine, which we are developing, will enable the A&E team to receive prompt advice from a skilled stroke consultant in the UK when a patient presents with a stroke to the A&E department. It will give medical and nursing staff in A&E support and advice on how to manage individual care. This will be by confirming diagnosis or making a differential diagnosis based on an expert assessment using a remote video-based consultation, a service which will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, thus improving the outcome for the patients. The use of this technology will start with stroke care, but will then continue to cover other specialities such as neurology, general medicine, general surgery, orthopaedics and others.

Mr Speaker, there have been an additional five defibrillators placed in public areas around Gibraltar, with a further one due to be installed when some refurbishment works are completed. The first ones ever, 10 in total, were placed by the Government last year.

Mr Speaker, 10 new Gibraltarians have been born as a result of this Government's introduction of IVF, and there are further pregnancies at the moment. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker, online access to British sign language interpretation for assisting access to healthcare by the profoundly deaf will allow such service users a dignified and informed access to this healthcare.

For the first time since moving to St Bernard's new site, comprehensive fire planning and fire training has been provided to key workers in GHA sites.

The GHA is working with staff from the office of the ombudsman to redraft how complaints will be managed in the future, with the aim of addressing complaints more efficiently and to have more transparency and independence in the process. The final draft of the new complaints process with the accompanying changes to the legislation are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Mr Speaker, in keeping in line with being up to date on EU directives, the Ministry set up a steering group to review the EU directive on cross-border healthcare and facilitate its implementation. Member states were given until October last year to implement the directive and the Commission will be monitoring the process to ensure that this is implemented fully across the EU. I am pleased to announce that after introducing new legislation – the Cross Border Healthcare Regulation 2013 – setting up a national contact point and the GHA Prior Authorisation Committee, all transposition was completed on time, by 25th October 2013.

Mr Speaker, the International Health Regulations (IHR), these regulations, which govern the processing of medical issues at our entry points, are due to come into force very shortly. The last administration had not given this priority, which would have left Gibraltar exposed at having inferior facilities at its entry points, especially its port, with the consequent effects on our reputation and success as a destination. I am pleased to say that once more this administration has worked with tremendous interdepartmental collaboration and efficiency and the Regulations will be published within weeks. This has not just meant the publishing of the Regulations, but ensuring that the processes are agreed and in place.

Mr Speaker, I would like to finish by sharing some examples of success and positive feedback, which is a reflection of the excellent work being carried out throughout the GHA.

Mr Speaker, from humble beginnings, dermatology in Gibraltar has grown over the years into a great service, to the full credit of the dermatology team. Evidence of this excellent service is the fact that one of the nurses leading this service, Ms Linda Castro, was placed in second place in the category of Dermatology Nurse of the Year in the UK. This is testimony to the professionalism and excellence of Linda



1355 in particular, but also of the other employees and the service in general. The unit is shortly to have improved facilities at the reconfigured Primary Care Centre, and recently held an extremely successful skin cancer awareness day and walk-in service with the collaboration of Unite, which received hundreds of visitors. This is a good point to mention the importance the Government gives to protecting the health of the community. To this end, future Government-organised or sponsored events will have available free  
1360 sunscreen and ear protection.

Mr Speaker, please allow me to quote just a few of the feedback that has recently been received.  
From a CCU patient:

‘Having been admitted to CCU suffering from a Pulmonary Embolism the quality of the doctors and nursing staff was off the chart. These guys are on the go for the whole shift yet their bedside manners and care was tremendous.’

And just one other:

1365 ‘It is most often the case that people will only write to you to complain about the service received from your organisation or take issue with a particular instance, action or aspect of the service. On this occasion, however, my wife and I would like to congratulate you on the thoroughly professional yet deeply caring manner which we were dealt with during our time at the Maternity Unit.’

There are many more.

Mr Speaker, as I conclude, I must thank all the nearly 1,000 staff of the Ministry and the Authority for their commitment, hard work, professionalism and the support they give me in performing my duties. All  
1370 our healthcare workers and support staff will forever remain our heroes. I wish to thank them all for their sterling work and performance, at times undertaken in very difficult and challenging circumstances.

I also want to thank the members of the various committees and boards in relation to both my Ministries, for their work and sense of public duty, and extend these thanks to associations and others in the voluntary sector who pay a tremendous role in improving and sustaining the health of our community.

1375 Mr Speaker, I am conscious of the responsibility that I and my team carry on our shoulders as we are entrusted with a budget of about £100 million. I can assure you, Mr Speaker, that never before will such money have been better spent, for we will see *real* improvements in the service that we provide.

Mr Speaker, there have been huge improvements in the Health Service provided in Gibraltar – I would say unprecedented in any similar period – but I am not satisfied: it is not enough. I have already said that my main areas of concern are access to primary care and A&E. There are a few other areas where improvements have lagged. Some of these include some of the services provided by visiting consultants. I am pleased to report that I am undertaking an incisive review of these services, in discussion with major UK providers, which will show marked improvements in the coming months. I am also committed to exploring new, alternative pathways and avenues of treatment as a way of increasing the range of services  
1385 available to our community.

Mr Speaker, among the difficulties we face is the need for space, both in the Primary Care Centre and at St Bernard’s, particularly as we consider the possibility of repatriating diagnostic services, such as MRI scans, to Gibraltar. I am therefore hugely pleased and proud to announce that the Government will shortly embark on the construction of a new wing at St Bernard’s Hospital, which will allow the GHA to relocate  
1390 many of those services which are short of space and facilitate the repatriation of services. This will be a separate building located in the central courtyard and is already being designed.

Mr Speaker, we will continue to develop this service. Our ambition is for Gibraltar to have a Health Service second to none – a service in which we can all take pride, services which will reach beyond our hospitals and provide care where it is needed most: at home and in our community. A commitment to learn and improve and a focus on partnership will allow the GHA to succeed. This commitment is what defines *this* Government and *this* Gibraltar Health Authority. The coming year will be a memorable one for our Health Service.  
1395

Mr Speaker, this Government of the GSLP and Liberals came into office with a promise of change. As I have clearly demonstrated with reference to both my portfolios, it is not change that has been delivered: it has been a veritable transformation. Thank you. (*Applause and banging on desks*) (A Member: Hear, hear.)  
1400

## ADJOURNMENT

1405 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, the Government is informed that the Minister for Europe will be landing in about 10 minutes, and therefore I think this is an appropriate moment to adjourn the House now to 9.00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

1410       **Mr Speaker:** I now propose the question which is that this House do now adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9.00 a.m when I will call upon the Hon. Jaime Netto to take the floor.

          I now put the question which is that this House do now adjourn until Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> July at 9.00a.m. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Passed.

The House will now adjourn until Tuesday at 9.00 a.m.

1415

*The House adjourned at 7.33 p.m.*