



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 9.06 a.m. – 11.40 a.m.

Gibraltar, Tuesday, 1st July 2014

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 9.06 a.m.*

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

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

## Order of the Day

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

**Clerk:** Mr Speaker, sitting of Parliament, Tuesday, 1st July. Second reading of the Appropriation Bill 2014. Budget speeches continue.

5 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Mr James Netto.

**Hon. J J Netto:** Mr Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I stand to deliver my 19th Budget address.

I will commence with matters to do with utilities first, followed by the environment, and lastly health and safety.

10 Mr Speaker, in relation to the power station, this is an area of concern due to the Government's inability to prioritise Gibraltar's important project, which is the new power station. As we have stated a number of times, the new incoming Government had the right not to proceed with the previous GSD Government project in relation to the power station, even when initial clearance work had already started. But to be in a position, almost three years after being elected, without a clear position with regard to Gibraltar's future needs with regard to power supply *in a safe manner*, given the site chosen, is incredible.

15 The Hon. Chief Minister's smokescreen for not pursuing the GSD Government's scheme for a new permanent power station is down to 'Had we continued with the GSD scheme we would have been saddled with a £120 million project,' or 'It was in the wrong location,' or 'Not the best available technology in environmentally friendly options,' or 'The consumer would have had massive increases per year for diesel consumption.'

20 The reality, Mr Speaker, is that when the Chief Minister quotes the £120 million, he is deliberately obfuscating the fact that such an amount was for a complete package inclusive of £20 million for associated infrastructural works, as opposed to the plant itself. The price also included a new office block for Gibelec. The location surely would not have been as bad as placing say a new football stadium at Europa Point, which the Chief Minister is adamant in doing, come hell or high water.

As far as technology is concerned, within the diesel types of engines, they were the best available technology at the time as advised by the experts. Or is the Chief Minister going to contradict the advice given to us by officials and experts in this field then? In addition to this, the IPPC Committee, which deals with such matters pursuant to European legislation, approved the scheme.

30 We do not make an apology for the fact that, based on grounds of safety, we ruled out having a dual fire plant run by diesel and gas. We do believe – then and now – that placing liquefied natural gas storage tanks so near to an area which is densely populated is a mistake and we are prepared to say it. Frankly, even if we need to pay more money in order to have higher standards of health and safety to avoid an accident ever happening in the proximity of a residential estate within the west side of Gibraltar, which would have colossal consequences if ever it were to happen, we would do it.

35 On the other hand, the Chief Minister is not in a position to preach to anyone about value for money, given that he has lost control of recurrent expenditure under his watch as Chancellor. This is a typical example of the pot calling the kettle black.

40 The Government also needs to be transparent in the way the Government handles projects of this kind. Throughout the period of this Government, I have been asking in Parliament on numerous occasions for all relevant copies of technical, environmental and health and safety reports, only to be stonewalled with

evasive answers in order to deny a Member of the Opposition from being able to scrutinise the Government on such an important project for Gibraltar.

45 Mr Speaker, it is inconceivable that such an attitude would prevail in the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly, or indeed in any municipality across the United Kingdom. Any project of this kind in any part of the UK would allow automatically the Members of the Opposition with instant access to all relevant information in order to allow proper scrutiny of the executive. However, here in Gibraltar the view that prevails by the Government is that accountability and transparency lie in the number of occasions that Parliament meets, as opposed to being transparent on its action in Parliament by providing the Opposition with information it seeks in order to have a debate on equal terms.

50 Mr Speaker, moving on: lack of a holistic plan. Another issue of concern that needs to be highlighted is the whole approach by Government in relation to projects that either are of the Government or private ones which are to be developed in close proximity to each other in the west side of Gibraltar and the port area.

55 In order to illustrate this point, we have a sullage tank to be operated again at the North Mole in close proximity of the cruise liners; liquefied natural gas storage tanks to be placed on the Detached Mole; ship-to-ship bunkering from the Detached Mole; laying of pipes on the sea floor connecting the liquefied natural gas storage tanks to the new power station; a new power station; and a new boats marina. And along the perimeter of all these projects we have an airport on one side, housing estates – including the new one to be built in the former coach park – and on the other side, a nuclear berth for submarines, not to mention the movement of cruise liners either inside the port or outside. Yet the Government approach to this matter is cavalier, *ad hoc*, covered in secrecy and dangerous.

60 On a number of occasions I have asked the Government in Parliament if they have undertaken a specialist holistic analysis of all the development within this area in order to protect the public, only to be informed by the Deputy Chief Minister that such a study is not necessary and each individual project is considered on its own merit at the Development and Planning Commission. In truth, we in the Opposition are not the only ones calling for this approach to developments in this whole area. The Environmental Safety Group is also advocating the same. Yet, whilst the argument is compelling to do so for the good of the environment and for health and safety matters, the Government refuses to do so. It beggars belief that the Government is so intransigent on such an important matter that has the potential to put people's lives at risk through their stubbornness.

70 Mr Speaker, moving to the environment, and on expenditure I notice that the sums estimated and required in the year ending 31st March 2015 for salaries, wages and expenses of the Environment, as reflected in head 14 Environment, is £12,862,000. This is £1,453,000 less than the estimate for the financial year 2013-14. This is in large measure due to the fact that subhead 2(6) Relief Cover, as shown on page 55 of the draft Estimate Book, amounting to a total of £1,938,000, has been transferred to a private company called Gibraltar Cleansing Services Ltd, under the control of the Employment Ministry, as shown on page 86 of the draft Estimate Book. Therefore, given this significant reorganisation of funds away from the management of the Environment Department, it requires a proper explanation by the Government as to why this has been deemed necessary. I certainly look forward to listening to why there has been a need for this and how such a decision will improve or hinder the services that the Department of the Environment needs to provide, although I notice that the Minister, from his very brief speech yesterday, he did not mention anything about this.

80 The other point I would like to make about expenditure, Mr Speaker, is that even if we add the total amount for the Department as shown in the draft of £12,862,000, plus the £1,938,000 transferred to this private company under the control of the Employment Department, this brings a grand total of £14,800,000. This is £710,970 more than the actual expenditure under the last full financial year of the GSD Government during 2010-11. So, even after adjusting for inflation during this intervening period, this lifts the sum requested by the Minister for his Department in comparable amounts to that under the GSD Government. An amazing fact, given that what one gets from the Minister of the Environment is constant rubbishing of the GSD's period in Government. For the Hon. Minister, it is all down to either the GSD did not do anything for the environment, or if we did it was all wrong and bad. This, despite the fact that he was the GSD Government adviser at the time and never felt it necessary to resign on principle from those duties then from the horrendous things he says now.

90 This also gives me the opportunity, on behalf of the Opposition, to congratulate Dr Liesl Mesilio-Torres for now holding the position of Chief Executive of the Department. I know Liesl well, and I am aware of how capable she is. We in the GSD are extremely proud that Liesl was the first individual employed in order to create a new Department of Environment, given that the GSLP before us did not believe in having such a Department nor in employing 90% of the current staff that the existing Minister now has at his disposal. But of course we would not expect recognition of this by the Minister.

100 Mr Speaker, moving on to renewable energy, as I did last year, I would like to start by giving credit where credit is due, then moving on to things that have not been that great, and finalising with things that have gone badly.

One of the most exciting things that has materialised in the last 12 months, at least for me, is the Government agreement with the company, Eco Wave Ocean Power Plant for the provision of an initial 0.5 megawatt energy device on the east side, with a view to further expansion to a full 5 megawatt plant if the project is successful, this being a technology based on harnessing surface wave energy by the use of specific buoys to capture and convert such energy. I noticed the words in the Government press statement, quote:

‘if the project is successful’

and I can understand why this is so. The reality is that we are talking, by and large, of new technologies that need to be tried and tested *in situ*, and I think this the right approach. Needless to say, all of us in this Chamber would like this project to succeed for the benefit of our community. These and other technologies were followed with great interest in my days while I was the Environment Minister, but unfortunately the technology had not developed sufficiently enough to warrant being introduced in Gibraltar back then in those days.

Clearly, with the passage of time more and more technologies are becoming available and whilst I notice the Minister’s response to my question about underwater current technology not being available for another 10 years or so, we should never stop from being kept abreast of development in this field, as I believe this to have the potential of giving a tremendous boost to a constant source of clean renewable energy for the future.

Mr Speaker, on netting for the Municipal Waste Station and fiscal incentive for the environment, credit too should be given for the placing of a net over the Municipal Waste Transfer Station at Europa Advance Road; thereby, according to the Minister, no longer having an issue of rubbish flying out from the site onto the surrounding cliffs or sea. I am pleased that the Minister paid notice to my question on this matter some time ago and that he has actioned a solution to this historical problem.

Also to be welcomed is a continuation of the GSD policy to use fiscal incentive measures as a means to make more environmentally friendly products more accessible to the public.

Mr Speaker, moving on to beaches, another project that seems to have gone well and which is almost complete is the work in Sandy Bay, both in relation to the construction of the two groynes and the submerged breakwater one, along with the regeneration of the beach itself. This no doubt will be enjoyed by many members of the public, hopefully for many years to come. Additionally, any extra biodiversity of marine life that prospers in the surrounding area is to be welcomed too.

Another area to be welcomed is the continued attendance by staff members of the Department of Environment in European seminars, the latest of which was in Greece in relation to matters to do with loss of biodiversity under the Natura 2000 programme. Such participation is important for a delegate in order to make aware other delegates of the particulars of our environment within the much wider picture of the Mediterranean and Europe. It is also an opportunity to extend our networking with other professionals in the field, thereby complementing the overall objectives.

Yet, Mr Speaker, whilst we have progress on one beach, we have stalemate on another, which is Western Beach. Clearly, to have progress in resolving the problems in Western Beach could only have been by pursuing two different avenues – the political, the legal, or both simultaneously.

The political has remained a non-starter as far as the La Linea Municipality is concerned, given that they do not have the necessary funds to do the infrastructural works needed; nor, it seems, from a regional basis as regards the Junta de Andalucía. The Junta, just like all other regional Governments in Spain, have been subjected to substantial cutbacks on their budget from Madrid as a result of the economic crisis, thereby being unable to provide such funding. Finally, on the political front, it seems that engaging Madrid is also a non-starter, given that the relations between the Madrid Government and Gibraltar are toxic and will remain so for some considerable time to come.

On the legal side, the Hon. Minister for the Environment has kept me informed confidentially of developments on the legal front. Unfortunately, this is a long and convoluted process, but the only one available to us right now.

I certainly am grateful to him for keeping me abreast of developments and the GSD Opposition will continue to conduct itself responsibly on this matter, placing the interests of the community first, which is the contrary to when the current Government were in Opposition and conducted orchestrated campaigns against the then GSD Government along with their friendly media press for not pursuing the matter with speed and vigour, something which is exactly what is happening today.

Mr Speaker, moving on to waste and waste water treatment plants, these are also important and essential projects for Gibraltar – namely the waste treatment plant and the waste water treatment plant – but the picture emanating is one of delays between the Government informing the public of such projects and the commencement of such; again something that, from the very brief speech of the Minister, he had nothing to say yesterday.

Take the case of the waste treatment plant. The Government informed the press way back in February 2013 – you can see the *Gibraltar Chronicle* of 16th February 2013 – of its decision to provide a new plant at the site of the old incinerator at the Europa Advance Road in order to treat the solid municipal waste with environmentally friendly technology. The Hon. Minister himself has had the consultant’s report on his desk since January 2013; and only last month, some 18 months later, the Minister responded to a Written Question to inform me that the tender is still under assessment.

The Hon. Minister knows that we have been taking our municipal waste in the past and in the present to the recycling plant in Los Barrios. This is a procedure which is fraught with problems, not least because of the impending compliance with the EU Landfill Directive for the amount of biodegradable waste that shall be allowed into the landfill. Yet, Mr Speaker, when I look at the draft Estimate Book, I do not see any entry for the commencement of this important project. The Government needs to inform Parliament whether this project will commence in this financial year or whether it is going to be paid from the Consolidated Fund or from Credit Finance Ltd, or indeed from any other source.

The same applies, Mr Speaker, to how the Government decide to proceed with the disposal of sewage. As we are aware, Gibraltar continues to discharge its raw sewage into the sea in contravention of EU Directives on this matter. The Government needs to make clear by when it will decide to award the tender for the proper treatment of raw sewage prior to discharging into the sea. Quite apart from doing so for good environmental reasons, we risk giving those who want to harm Gibraltar with a perfect opportunity to tarnish our reputation abroad.

The Government needs to inform Parliament whether, as a delay of implementation of this project, the British Government is incurring fines from the European Union or likely to happen any time soon; also whether the Government intends to proceed with this project, given that there is no provision within the draft Estimate Book – or perhaps it will, but by using money indirectly from the proceeds of the Savings Bank via Credit Finance Ltd. Either way, the Government needs to state what is happening in this important area of the environment.

Mr Speaker, fishing in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters: it has been over two years since the now infamous episode of Government policy being placed on Facebook – the statement by the Hon. the Minister for the Environment announcing that the laws of Gibraltar were to be enforced forthwith and that illegal fishing in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters would be stopped as per the Government manifesto commitment; an announcement since referred to, by the no less a body than the Chamber of Commerce, as a ‘rookie error’; an announcement which plunged Gibraltar into a dispute which still has no signs of resolution.

We have the unprecedented case of an unnecessary crisis that erupted in March 2012, which has seen the unabated fishing in our waters by the Spanish fishing fraternity and a crescendo of hostility as a result of the Government incompetence in handling such delicate matters. The Government position in this case has been that our laws need to be respected by the Spanish fishermen; yet it is amazing that when our Chief Minister was asked in the recently released programme *Viajando con Chester* as to why the Spanish fishermen were denied the opportunity of fishing our waters, the Chief Minister responded by saying that the fishermen were fishing without any hindrance. Given the Chief Minister’s response, one is entitled to ask why then the 1999 agreement was broken without notice, only to provide the fishermen with a licence to do whatever the fishermen decide to do, regardless of the laws passed by this Government. Why then plunge Gibraltar into a crisis of their own making with the consequences being paid by ordinary people on both sides of the frontier? The public is entitled to know until when is this crisis going to be prolonged, and when is the Government going to resolve the crisis it started?

Mr Speaker, moving on to Barbary Macaques, an important area where the Minister for the Environment is simply plodding along is with the problems with the Barbary Macaques. Within the figures provided by the Minister in terms of the population of the macaques, we see that the high-level rate of population was in 2006 with 242 macaques, followed by 241 in 2007 and in 2008. Following on from these figures, the population starts to drop to 212 in 2009; 182 in 2010; and in the last year of the GSD Government, 175 in 2011.

So what then, Mr Speaker, do we observe under the watch of the current Minister? I should add here that the watch of the Minister has existed for the last 20 years or so in which the Hon. Minister used to be the previous adviser on this matter. Well, in 2012, the population started to increase again to 183, from 175. Then, in 2013, it grows to 206; and in 2014, the figure is 225, although this figure needs to be adjusted for possible further births and deaths for the remainder of the year. So tentatively, under the watch of the current Minister, the population has increased by a further 50, taking the situation back to the levels that existed in 2004. So whilst the population of macaques decreased under the last years of the GSD Government, now it is increasing again under the GSLP Liberal Government.

So why then did the population drop by 67 in the last few years of the GSD Government, and why has the population increased by 50 in the two and a half years of the present Government? The answer lies in the fact that, in the last years of the GSD Government, a programme of culling was implemented due to the

difficulties in exporting the macaques, which would have otherwise been the preferred option. Yet culling has been ruled out by the present Government due to the virulent campaign waged by the GSLP Liberal Opposition in tandem with animal rights organisations in the UK in order to tarnish the good name of Gibraltar abroad for their own selfish partisan interest over the interests of this community.

The irony of the situation, Mr Speaker, is that we have a Minister who has studied and written about Barbary Macaques for the last 20 to 30 years, yet today he has not released the Gibraltar Macaques Management Plan in order for the public to know what the Minister's objectives in this area are.

On 1st March 2013, *The Times* newspaper carried an article in which the Minister informed them that the Gibraltar Government would be exporting macaques to Morocco, Tunisia, safari parks in the UK and in Europe in order to alleviate the overpopulation problem in Gibraltar. Nonetheless, when I asked the Minister recently whether there had been any exportation of macaques, the answer was that no export has taken place.

So, some 15 months later, the Minister has not exported *any* macaques. We have a population on the rise, despite the new contraceptive scheme introduced under the current Government. We have more packs of macaques splitting than ever before, all conducting themselves into new groups or subgroups, searching for other areas closer to urban ones in order to settle – and all the Minister does is talk and more talk and more experts and the creation of more and more management committees.

At this rate, soon we will have a new inter-ministerial committee with participation with macaques for the study to resolve the problems of overpopulation, with meetings to be arranged perhaps at the Sunborn Hotel, with expenses paid by No. 6 Convent Place. The findings of all these meetings can then be submitted for consideration to the never-to-be-published Gibraltar Macaques Management Plan for the eventual reduction of the macaques overpopulation. Oh boy, talk about kicking the problem into the long grass!

Another failure within the policy of the Minister with regard to macaques is the enforcement of the new legislation for eradicating the illegal feeding of macaques either in the nature reserve or outside. Despite much publicity with regard to the illegality of feeding the monkeys, with press statements and literature about how the macaques' behaviour has been changed since feeding the monkeys the wrong food or overfeeding them, the only person cautioned for feeding the macaques has been *one tourist*. Is this how the Minister expects to end this unacceptable practice? What is the point of new laws when there is a huge gap between the law and enforcement? What is the point of surreptitiously bringing through the back door two new environmental protection officers with powers to enforce the provisions of wildlife wardens under the Nature Protection Act when the illegality of feeding the macaques goes on unabated?

And if all of this is not enough, the Minister commenced a strategy to get the monkeys back to the nature reserve, which imported into Gibraltar illegal noise pyrotechnics from Spain that do not comply with European legislation. The Minister, when informed about this in Parliament, adopted the attitude of seeking advice on the matter as a form of kicking another ball into the long grass. Quite frankly, why doesn't the Minister simply plead guilty to the charge and plead clemency on the grounds that his actions were motivated to placate the public outcry over the macaques' occupation of urban human areas? The fact that the Minister has a doctorate in natural sciences does not mean that he is omniscient.

Yet I have no doubt that when the Chief Minister's right of reply comes, he will continue to say that all of this is the GSD's fault and that they will, in due course, put things right. At least they can make a start by publishing the Gibraltar Macaques Management Plan, so that the public can be the judge of their policies in this important matter. But transparency and accountability is not one of the Governments fortes: why bother with transparency and accountability when we have more meetings of Parliament, Mr Speaker?

Moving to enforcement of litter regulations, back in 2013, the Minister for the Environment announced, to much fanfare, a new impetus in the fight to clamp down on people littering the streets by revamping the Litter Committee and by introducing much heavier fines to ensure that this practice would get eradicated. At the time, I remember thinking, 'Well, perhaps the Minister is serious about stamping out this practice by penalising such offenders with heavy fines.' I did therefore allow some time to monitor progress, but recently I asked for the number of litter tickets issued by either the RGP, the Environmental Agency or the Highways Enforcement Officers, and the response was that to date only six such tickets have been issued between 2013 and 2014. Again, we find ourselves in the same predicament as is the situation with the macaques. The Minister talks tough, makes many promises, but when it comes to action he is found wanting and certainly not making any difference to the state of our pavements on which many members of the public need to tread very carefully in order not to get stuck in dog foul. This is a fact that the hon. Minister does not need to go far to find the evidence, as he has it straight in front of St. Bernard's Hospital, amongst other places.

Mr Speaker, culling of seagulls, another subject not mentioned by the Minister in his very brief speech. Here again, the Minister has lost control of events. Looking at the figures provided by the Minister in Parliament, we have the following facts. In 2009, GONHS culled 4,562 seagulls and the then FERA company 3,812, making a total for the year of 8,374. In 2010, GONHS culled 4,075 and FERA 5,508,

making a total for the year of 9,583. In 2011, GONHS culled 3,491 and FERA 5,708, making a total for the year of 9,199. In 2012, GONHS culled 3,391 and FERA 2,694, making it a total for the year of 6,085.

280 It should be said that the reason why FERA only culled 2,694 in that year was because the Minister decided to terminate the contract with FERA on the grounds that the work involved could be easily be done by GONHS. Therefore, the amount of money voted in Parliament for the work carried out by FERA – of £110,000 in the financial year 2012-2013 – moved practically in its totality to GONHS in the financial year 2013-14, making a total of £207,000 for the purpose of culling seagulls. Yet when we look at the figures of  
285 seagulls culled in 2013 by GONHS alone, it amounts to 2,649 for the year; this being less than the seagulls culled by GONHS in 2012, which amounted to 3,391 yet with a combined budget of what GONHS and FERA had in the previous years. Worse still, the forecast outturn for the financial year 2013-14 is expected to be £131,000. This means that, for more money being placed with GONHS, the public gets less seagulls culled; and if the figures for the end of April 2014 get extrapolated for the end of the year, 2014 will be  
290 worse than 2013.

Mr Speaker, what could have happened in this period for the Minister for the Environment to have lost his eye on the ball? It must have been the time spent on his vanity garden project in Queensway. What excuses will the Hon. Minister come up with? Blame the GSD again for things happening under his watch? Come up with another committee of experts to provide the Minister with a management plan for the culling  
295 of seagulls? Or will he counterattack by spinning some scientific rhetoric to cover his inaction on this matter? Clearly, the Minister does not have a clue on achieving value for money for the taxpayer, not to mention the members of the public whose lives are blighted by the massive overpopulation of seagulls.

Mr Speaker, moving to the state of the Botanical Gardens, again, another subject not mentioned by the Minister in his very brief speech. The consequences of the Minister losing sight of his environmental responsibility does not just remain on the issue of seagulls and macaques; it extends to the dilapidated state of the Botanic Gardens. Despite the constant grandiosity of comments, to which everyone is subjected, on his alleged single-handedness in restoring the Alameda Gardens – with graphic illustration of him sitting in despair by the flower bed kerbstone, making everyone listening start to cry – the Minister leaves out of the story that what was inherited then was the privatisation of the maintenance of the Gardens by a so-called  
305 Socialist Chief Minister, who had not invested in the Alameda Gardens for eight years; nor that the last Budget passed by the GSD Government was an amount of £854,000 from the pittance that was provided by the GSLP Government; nor does the Minister give recognition to the hard work done by the staff who have worked there for years. According to the Minister, *all* the merit is to be reflected by the action of one person: the Minister himself. For him, this is a story about ‘I’ and not ‘we’. Yet what is the story today in the Botanic Garden? It is the deplorable conditions of the pathways, and in particular of Grand Parade Walk. It is also the deplorable state of the street furniture within the Gardens. No doubt the Minister – I can see the Hon. Minister, Mr Linares, laughing in nervousness (*Interjection*) about what I am telling him. Perhaps he will have something to say about... but at least he could have the courtesy of allowing me to finish. (*Interjections*)

315 No doubt the Minister will now insist that this too is the GSD’s fault, based on some fanciful argument about measuring the growth of the roots of trees during the 16 years in which the GSD was in Government! Never mind that the person in charge of the maintenance of the gardens then, who today is the Minister, never bothered to do anything about it; never mind that, in almost three years as the Minister for the Environment, he has abandoned responsibility for the condition of the Botanic Gardens; and never mind  
320 that in the draft Estimate Book there is no provision for the necessary work to be done in this financial year. But of course, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister has been too busy in his vanity park in Queensway to have time to provide the public who go to the Alameda Gardens with reasonable standards of facilities.

So how can the Minister rescue himself from this position? Create another committee, to be called the ‘Botanic Gardens Management Plan’, and two months before the next election he can then have the works done and even get the pretty picture for the next manifesto? I can even see what the heading of the story in the manifesto will be: ‘Botanic Gardens rescued from the wretched GSD legacy!’

Mr Speaker, moving on to landscaping and planting of trees... Moving on to the subject of planting trees, which in some ways overlaps with the Botanic Gardens but obviously it is much broader. Here again, the Minister is keen to blow his trumpet as to the amount of trees planted during the period of the present  
330 Government; yet what the Minister will not do is to provide Parliament with true figures of trees cut throughout Gibraltar, with the spurious argument that one cannot differentiate a tree from a shrub.

But what is more worrying is that there is no coherent plan for landscaping throughout Gibraltar, particularly when it comes to the planting of trees. What we have is a situation in which trees are being placed in an *ad hoc* manner, with some already dying and some already dead due to the fact that no proper  
335 forward planning has been done for ground preparation, use of organic materials, soil, manure, and of course irrigation; all important components for the successful life of a tree.

If we look at some of the trees planted in the Jewish Boulevard and in the Alameda Estate, they are already in a dreadful condition. Clearly, the Minister’s much-trumpeted environmental filter has not worked

again and remains useless. What Gibraltar needs – and one would have expected the current Minister to lead on this subject – is a ‘Landscaping Management Plan’ in order to plan and implement proper procedures when planting new trees and safeguarding existing ones throughout Gibraltar.

As an aside, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister for the Environment is all too keen to repeat the statement that this is a new Government, leading by example. However, once again we notice that in the Minister’s third Budget speech he continues to read his speech from single-sided printed paper; this, when we have a situation (*Laughter*) when in the Minister’s first Budget address, he informed Parliament of how the new green filter for procurement had established a policy of purchasing printers to print double-sided text in all Government Departments, something that was pointed out to the Minister by my Hon. Learned Friend, Mr Figueras, for reading his speech on single-sided paper.

Mr Speaker, moving to Barbary Partridges – (*Interjections*) I take satisfaction that the hon. Members of the Government are enjoying my speech, Mr Speaker! (*Interjection*)

**A Member:** You’re welcome!

**Hon. J J Netto:** I think they need to calm down; they are getting too nervous.

The Hon. Minister for the Environment is keen to be seen as someone who is passionate in the conservation of the Barbary Partridges, given the picture in his Twitter account. Yet, as the Minister for the Environment, his inaction to protect them will mean that the indigenous Barbary Partridge of Gibraltar is critically endangered and on its way to face the same outcome as the dodo in Mauritius. (*Interjection*) Of course, blame the GSD! Always blame the GSD!

Much as the Minister would like to blame the GSD Government for all of Gibraltar’s ills, the fact remains that under his watch we have arrived at a situation where the number of indigenous Barbary Partridges is the lowest ever. Not only that, but knowing, as he knows better than anyone in this Chamber, what the natural predators of the partridges are, he has done nothing to deal with this serious problem. The Minister seems to be caught like a rabbit on a road by the headlights of an incoming car... with ensuring the population of seagulls does not continue to eat the eggs or chicks of partridges, as stated by me in my earlier speech, or the feral cats that pose such a threat to the partridges. Given that the current party in Government can be termed as a party of all things to all men, it is clear that the Minister has taken the decision of not culling feral cats for any possible loss of votes from those who would be against such policy. So, through his indecisions we face extermination of the indigenous Barbary Partridges.

For over a year now, Mr Speaker, the Hon. Minister has been trying to wash off his inaction on the partridges on the basis that partridges of the same genetic lineage will be brought from Morocco; yet, from the answer given both last month and in this one, we can conclude that on the issue of safeguarding the partridges, as in the culling of macaques or the culling of seagulls or feral cats, the Minister is all talk and more talk and no action.

Mr Speaker, moving to transparency and accountability, lack of transparency abounds from the manner in which this Government operates. Take, for instance, the various companies providing a service to the Department of the Environment. Back in May 2013, I asked the Hon. Minister if he could provide me with copies of the contract providing services to the Department; something he refused to do, on the basis that such contracts remain exactly as they were when they came into Government. However, in answer to a supplementary question from my Hon. and Learned Friend, the Leader of the Opposition, the Minister would not accept informing me of any variation of any of the existing contracts providing services to the Department of the Environment because it would have to be a collegiate response from the Government as to whether to inform the Opposition. Yet in May of this year, once again I asked the Hon. Minister if there had been any changes to existing contracts, only to be responded to, in a terse tone, that his role is not watching observance to the contracts.

Yet today, the Opposition is aware of at least one variation to one contract – in Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd, in which, until very recently, the Hon. Minister had shares in that company and has now sold them to someone else; a contract, I should add, that has been awarded the maintenance of the Commonwealth Park. However, the changes to the ownership of Wildlife Gibraltar Ltd were only found by the Opposition as a result of my Question to the Minister last week. The Minister had to tell us only last week that he had just written to the Clerk of Parliament, notifying him of the changes in the ownership composition of the company in which the Hon. Minister had an interest before and his wife continues to be a shareholder. No-one is saying that there is anything improper, but to say we are not entitled to quiz the Government on this is nonsense.

Mr Speaker, moving on to health and safety, to talk about health and safety with regard to the initiatives or actions by the current Minister for Health and Safety is simply to say that *nothing* has happened or is likely to happen while the current incumbent is holding such responsibility.

In 19 years of listening to Budget speeches in this Chamber, last year was the first time ever that a Minister holding a responsibility for a particular subject did not utter a single word on the responsibility the



Minister holds: quite a dereliction of duties and an attitude of not being willing to promote and develop health and safety policies, which is his duty as a Minister.

400 Since last year's Budget address I have asked the Hon. Mr Bossano whether the Government has conducted any reviews on the Health and Safety Inspectorate team, the current legislation, its policies and procedures since December 2011 insofar as it applies to the private sector and Government organisations; and if so, to provide Parliament with a date of the reviews, the name of the person or entity, details of the items examined and any implementation emanating from such a review – only to be answered by the Minister saying, 'No, Mr Speaker.' The answer is quite incredible, as it seems to imply that the Minister for Health and Safety is not aware that a review is indeed taking place behind the Minister's back without him knowing anything about it. The review is being conducted between the Chief Minister and the union, not to mention the various reports submitted by various specialists on health and safety on how to review the current legislation and the Inspectorate role within the Factories Act.

410 Mr Speaker, the Minister's response is symptomatic of the malaise that prevails with this Government's attitude towards health and safety. Consider my Question to the Minister in relation to how many codes of practice have been issued, or how many health and safety committees have now emerged within the public sector; and the answer provided is, remarkably, in Bossano-esque style: 'There have been no new codes of practice and there are no new health and safety committees.' In other words, not only is the Minister not prepared to do anything to develop health and safety, but he is quite proud of the fact that he does not care about the responsibility he has.

420 Given the circumstances that prevail, it is quite understandable that the Chief Minister is doing the review on health and safety, but you will forgive me for saying that in normal circumstances, when a Minister refuses to do his responsibility, the normal thing to do is to get rid of the Minister and place someone who is willing and capable of discharging his responsibilities. Yet here we have the curious situation of a Chief Minister tip-toeing around the Minister's dereliction of duties in order not to upset the Minister for his dereliction. What this shows is a weak Chief Minister within a fractured Government.

*(Interjection)*  
425 As if all this was not enough, the recurrent issue of opaqueness has also had a role to play with regard to the manner in which different Ministers operate a negative policy on health and safety. Take into consideration the response of the Education Minister when he refused to provide Parliament with copies of the health and safety audit report in some schools; or the response of the Health Minister, who also refuses to provide Parliament with copies of the health and safety report by the Health Authority Health and Safety Committee; or the fact that the Government will not provide Parliament with the name of the companies that infringe the law in health and safety, as is the practice in the UK; or the fact that this Government is not willing to provide annual reports on health and safety for the benefit of trade unions, employers, health and safety specialists and Parliament in order to assess either the Government's lack of aims and objectives or statistical facts emanating from the various industry groups in Gibraltar. It is a scandal that goes to the heart of how this Government dishonestly operates.

430 It is obvious, Mr Speaker, that if we are going to have progress in health and safety or the environment, or in a safer new power station, or in not mortgaging our children's livelihood with debt arising from uncontrolled and unaccountable spending from this Government, then the sooner we have a GSD Government, the better for this community. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) If we, as a community, want to restore the sense of security and prosperity we enjoyed under the previous GSD Government, then the sooner we elect a new GSD Government the better. And if we want to restore the sense of normalisation that existed between the communities on both sides of the frontier, the sooner we elect a GSD Government the better.

440 To conclude Mr Speaker, from the Opposition benches, there is only one word left to say, and that is 'palante'.

445 Finally, my thanks to the staff of Parliament for their continued help and advice.

**A Member:** Hear, hear. *(Banging on desks)*

450 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Miss Samantha Sacramento. *(Banging on desks)*

**A Member:** Happy hour this morning. *(Laughter and interjections)*

455 **Minister for Equality, Social Services and the Elderly (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, we have now been in office over two and a half years and I can reflect proudly on the differences that have been undertaken by my Ministry and the Departments I am responsible for.

This year has been an extremely positive one in terms of numerous developments coming to fruition as well as how our services have been extended to assist the more vulnerable in our community. We are now

460 at a stage where progress is real and is tangible and, Mr Speaker, there are still more good things to come as other projects become a reality during the course of this coming year.

I will commence with the progress in my Equality portfolio, as this has been so marked this year and symbolic of this Government's overall commitment to a fair and just society.

465 As I have said previously, equality is at the heart of this Government, and our commitment to equality shows a natural progression towards an inclusive society and it is a recognition of a modern Gibraltar. We are committed to setting up an Equal Opportunities Commission, which will be responsible for promoting equal treatment for all without discrimination, as provided for in the Equal Opportunities Act. This coming financial year will see an advancement in developing this, and in the meantime the statutory function will continue to be discharged by the Citizens' Advice Bureau and we continue to work closely with them and support their initiatives.

470 I am immensely proud of having been appointed by the Chief Minister as the first Minister for Equality; and in that capacity, having passed the Civil Partnership Act earlier this year. It truly is a landmark piece of legislation, Mr Speaker; one which enables the formal recognition of relationships between couples of the same sex. It is important because this Government recognises that there are gay men and gay women in Gibraltar and they live in loving and committed relationships. They are entitled to a formal recognition of that commitment in the eyes of the law and that is progress and that is equality. To have been invited to the first civil partnership ceremony was truly special, and particularly since it was the celebration by a couple who have been pioneers in standing up for gay rights and challenging the establishment. They won their David and Goliath battle against the former administration, who refused to give them the right to a joint tenancy in a Government flat and that case was fought all the way to the Privy Council at taxpayers' expense. How times have changed. Our Government recognises the fundamental human rights of gay people, quite unlike the way that they were treated when the GSD were in office.

480 Furthermore, Mr Speaker, this past year we have outlawed homophobic hate crime and hate speech and made these aggravated criminal offences. It is therefore no surprise that community groups now feel the freedom and confidence to organise days such as International Day against Homophobia and Pride. Such groups no longer live in fear of expressing themselves and they know that they have the full support of this Government in these endeavours.

490 Turning to disability, it is clear that Gibraltar's landscape is changing to make it more accessible, and our progress is not limited to those with physical limitations but also those with learning disabilities. Our aim is to improve the lives of people with disabilities and this is being achieved by having, for the first time in Gibraltar's history, a Ministry for Equality and within that established a Department that is dedicated to disability. Since last year, we now have additional staff. We have a head of department to deal with matters at a strategic and policy level and a truly dedicated and motivated disability awareness officer, and I have to say at this point that that does not represent any increase in our complement but more a readjustment of existing posts.

495 Equality is an issue that transcends all Government Departments, as indeed it does our community. My Department is able to co-ordinate and oversee matters relating to disability in all other Government Departments and is involved in all Government projects. It is the policy of this Government to ensure that all new projects going forward are fully accessible and my Department offers advice and guidance on this. We have undertaken a robust review of all matters to do with disabilities and in the past year have made significant developments in an area that has generally been quite dormant. As we work on achieving a disability action plan, all these things fall neatly into line.

500 Mr Speaker, the fruit of our work, and in particular inter-agency working together, has not gone unnoticed and recently we were recognised, by a tour operator specialising in holidays to meet the requirements of people with disabilities, as an accessible holiday destination – an achievement indeed for our initiatives and those of the Minister for Tourism to be recognised internationally.

505 One of the most significant aspects of the work we have undertaken so far is to review current legislation and provide laws modelled on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled. A lot of work has been undertaken on the drafting of this important piece of legislation and I am delighted to report that we will be in a position to present the new laws by the end of this year.

510 The most fundamental change that the new legislation will bring is the statutory obligation to make premises accessible to people with disabilities. At the moment, we are giving careful consideration to how this will be achieved in a responsible manner, as we are learning from the experience in the UK.

515 Notwithstanding and in advance of the legislation being in place, we already have a programme of auditing and reforming Government premises and public areas, and of course all new Government projects will be fully accessible. The Government Technical Services Department, in consultation with the Ministry for Equality and the GHA Occupational Therapy Department, have already been busy identifying and making improvements to our community. Mr Speaker, I am sure you will have noticed all the progress and significant improvements we have already made.

520 In order to ensure that we are fully equipped to do this properly, my Department arranged for specialist training to be delivered on access audits earlier this year. The course trained participants to be able to identify barriers to access and solve these, including access audits to historical buildings. The course was aimed at the Government's Technical Services Department, occupational therapists and anyone involved with the responsibility of access to public buildings and services.

525 The accessible beaches project is a prime example of the huge progress we have made. This year, we took stock of the flagship projects we undertook at the beaches last year and the service has been expanded and further improved by the Gibraltar Tourist Board. An announcement on the new bathing pavilion at the old GASA site will be made very shortly and the whole community will be able to fully benefit from it this summer. I say 'fully' because this exciting new project is completely accessible throughout.

530 Works have been undertaken to St Michael's Cave, the Gibraltar International Airport Terminal, and Parliament will be fully accessible for wheelchair users once the refurbishment works are complete.

Works have also been undertaken at St Bernard's Hospital.

We have worked with the Gibraltar Bus Company, making all bus stops accessible to wheelchair users as the ones we inherited were not, and the new buses purchased will be fully accessible too.

535 Voice synthesisers will be installed in all lifts in Government rental estates in order to assist those with visual impairment and these will be ready shortly.

We have been working very closely with GHITA on issues relating to our deaf community and Government has funded staff from the Care Agency, the GHA and the Department of Education to undertake British Sign Language training in levels 1 and 2, and we supported the first Deaf Awareness Conference in October last year.

540 We have been working to ensure that there are no barriers when we organise public events. You will have seen a British sign language interpreter on stage during the National Day Rally over the past two years and he has already been engaged for this year. At present we are working on a text relay service, so as to make services more accessible to the deaf.

545 Government has now purchased a wheelchair viewing platform and this will be used at all public gatherings and concerts, whether or not organised by Government, to enable participation by wheelchair users.

I will expand further on services related to people with learning disabilities when I refer to the Care Agency.

550 We have invested greatly in the fabric of Gibraltar already as part of this Government's task of achieving access for all and enabling the disabled in our community. I feel that we have come a long way in dealing with issues related to disabilities. I am not suggesting that everything that needs to be done has been done, but a lot has been done so far and certainly this is a work in progress and we can be proud of our achievements so far. We continue to work closely with related groups and societies and this is one of the benefits of the Government's open-door policy. Interdepartmental working is proving to be very effective and the success of my centralised Department is obvious.

555 Turning to women, Mr Speaker, I always wonder whether there is such a thing as 'women's issues', as any issue that affects women affects us all.

560 So what does equality for women really mean? It means identifying circumstances in which women are particularly vulnerable or placed at a disadvantage. It is about ensuring a level playing field in opportunities, and what it does not mean is that women should be favoured over men, whether it is for jobs or posts or for places on boards.

I have mentioned in the past that Government is in the process of collecting and collating statistics of women in the workplace. Once that data is ready, we will evaluate the situation and decide what action needs to be taken and we will consider what initiatives may need to be introduced.

565 The recent change to the public sector working hours will undoubtedly benefit many working women, and the flexibility of the working hours will help them balance home and work commitments.

We are also looking at projects to empower girls and young women. We have an excellent education system, Mr Speaker, in Gibraltar, and I want to ensure that young women have the confidence to pursue whatever path they wish to choose in life.

570 Furthermore, in the context of women's issues, last year Government formally requested the extension to Gibraltar of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Such a step forms part of the Government's continuing policy on the principles of equality and fairness.

575 Mr Speaker, I am fortunate to represent the Gibraltar Parliament on a Steering Committee of Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians. Through this forum, I hold regular meetings with like-minded colleagues and have been invited to speak at conferences that I have attended. I would like to announce today that, as a member of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians Steering Group, I have agreed to host a conference for women parliamentarians early in 2015. Personally I am very excited about this and it will be the first time that there will have been a conference dedicated to meaningful discussion on the advancement of women's issues in Gibraltar.

580 We know that another issue that affects women, predominantly though not exclusively, is domestic  
abuse. Apart from the provision of two buildings to be used as a shelter for women, the previous  
administration did very little in terms of support for victims of domestic abuse. Women in Need, the charity  
that runs the shelter, had very little practical input or support from Government, aside from a grant, and Mr  
585 Speaker, joined-up strategic thinking simply did not exist in the past. Indeed, we have worked with them to  
redress this. We are in the process of regularising their position in connection to Government, but more  
importantly, working closely with them to offer real and practical support and offer them training and  
guidance. The staff at Women in Need undertake exemplary work to help victims of domestic abuse and the  
service is an essential component of the whole domestic abuse matrix. Importantly, there is now  
590 communication between them and Social Services so that they can work together seamlessly in relevant  
cases. Social Services is a pivotal player in this and I will expand on the changes made to the service to  
make it more effective later on.

At present, we are involved in a process of collecting empirical data to analyse the extent and the impact  
of domestic abuse in Gibraltar. We are also working on establishing a forum where all the key players in  
relation to domestic abuse will meet and discuss working practices at a strategic level; and as soon as the  
595 work necessary in the individual departments is complete, we will meet together to develop the strategy.  
That is not to say, Mr Speaker, that because the forum has not formally met, that no work has been done at  
a strategic level or individually in developing these departments.

Finally on this front, through my contacts with other Commonwealth parliamentarians, we will be  
twinning with colleagues in Wales who have developed a very successful domestic abuse strategy.

600 Turning to the Care Agency, Mr Speaker, I continue to try and improve the way in which the Care  
Agency develops and delivers a more efficient and effective service than that which I found when I took on  
ministerial responsibility for it. Like any progressive organisation, there is now a continual process of  
revision that takes place as we encounter daily issues.

As an organisation that was in complete chaos when I inherited it, it is now beginning to take shape.  
605 One of the major problems was that the human resources department operated in a way that was completely  
*ad hoc* and unco-ordinated. Last year we introduced a database for human resources which is now fully  
functional, and with improvements being made continuously we are now investing in the human resources  
department so that staff have a clear understanding of employment issues within the Agency.

Although the Care Agency is the fruit of the merger of the previous Social Services and Elderly Care  
610 Agencies, aspects of the Agency had never merged, particularly in the way that the human resources  
department operated. A case in point is the staff handbook, and this year will see the consolidation of both  
previous handbooks and the creation of one single handbook.

In terms of investment in management, Mr Speaker, in December 2013, 12 junior and middle managers  
embarked on a five-day course in management training, spread over three months, allowing time to  
615 complete specific tasks on managing people, communicating effectively and building effective teams.

Employees are the backbone to any organisation and its service users and the people that we need to  
ensure receive the best possible care. Therefore, the development and implementation of an effective  
framework for learning in all forms – academic, professional and vocational – is imperative to enable staff  
to be fully prepared and provide the appropriate care to the people we are responsible for. With stronger  
620 training, support staff are now able to feel professional in their roles and have a clearer understanding, as  
well as knowing the purpose for which their job is being delivered. It is very satisfying to see that there are  
still a vast majority of workers who show vocational qualities that can be enhanced with appropriate  
training. The Care Agency continues with its approach of investing in people and we continue to strive  
towards ensuring that its workforce comprises appropriately skilled people in the right places, working to  
625 deliver high quality care.

The Care Agency's new dedicated training team is exemplary and provides a better service year on year.  
During this year, the Care Agency training team has been extremely busy and proactive; they have not only  
continued to research, facilitate, deliver and review training to ensure evidence-based practice is taught to  
enhance skills, but they continue to develop their own skills and develop in-house training programmes.  
630 They have also expanded their remit by collaborating and delivering training for other Government  
Departments. The elements of the training are split into numerous sections. I will obviously not refer to all  
the training that we undertake, Mr Speaker, but I will concentrate on the most important ones.

Principally, Mr Speaker, the introduction to the Care Agency will involve the Care Agency Generic  
Core Training, and this has continued to be provided throughout 2013 and 2014 for existing staff and ETCL  
635 trainees.

I want to mention a new, resourceful piece of equipment we have bought which is an age stimulation  
and empathy suit, and it has been incorporated into the training. This equipment helps staff to walk in the  
shoes of the elderly and thereby make them more in tune with the needs of their job.

640 Trainers and instructors in the Care Agency have been trained, qualified and updated in various subjects  
to enable mandatory training programmes to be continued and developed in house in the individual

services. It is important that the Care Agency training team also maintain their professional development and enhance their skills. Therefore, provision was made for them to gain further qualifications as recognised in Gibraltar and the UK by completing the Level 3 Award in Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

645 In November 2013, the Care Agency training team procured the British Institute of Learning Disabilities to visit Gibraltar and provide training on learning disability awareness. This training consisted of five one-day sessions. Over the period of the five days, a total of 127 people attended from the Care Agency, Department of Education, Royal Gibraltar Police, Gibraltar Health Authority and the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority. The aim of the training was to develop an understanding and look at positive approaches  
650 to working with people with learning disabilities, autism and mental health problems. The training had excellent reviews and such training will be expanded upon in future.

Not only have the dedicated in-house training team provided a service to the Care Agency; they have also shared their expertise and trained other Government Departments and bodies. Our team have provided training to the lifeguards employed by the Tourist Board in moving and manual handling procedures, so  
655 that they are fully equipped to assist people with disabilities who use the Beach Accessibility Service.

Relationships between the Care Agency and the Gibraltar Health Authority are thriving. The School of Health Studies has made places available for nurses working in Elderly Residential Services to attend courses in mentorship, fall prevention, dignity awareness and diabetes, to name a few. These courses allow staff to maintain continued professional development through Kingston University in the UK.

660 Moreover, two Care Agency employees have been given the opportunity to undertake the enrolled nurse course, due to complete this coming month, and they will then return to the Elderly Residential Services with qualifications, knowledge and skills that they can put into practice as nurses. It is expected that this opportunity will be repeated regularly, every couple of years, thereby increasing the local availability of people with the skills and qualifications required for such job vacancies when they arise.

665 Perhaps the most significant initiative that was commenced last year is a training programme that has been devised and is co-ordinated and delivered by Care Agency staff through the Ministry of Employment. In December 2013, the Care Agency developed a course – An Introduction to Elderly and Dementia Care – and has facilitated the delivery of this course to just over 100 registered unemployed people with the Employment and Training Board through this financial year. This course, Mr Speaker, has been *incredibly*,  
670 *incredibly* successful. These people receive fundamental theoretical information and are taught practical skills over a three-week period, attending a full five days a week. All the subjects follow the Skills for Care Common Induction Standards for care workers in the UK, and on completion of the course the attendees are provided with certificates of attendance. In addition, a two-week work-experience placement is offered in the Elderly Residential Services of the Care Agency or the long-stay wards at St Bernard's Hospital. The  
675 training will enable these people to build up a portfolio to support them in their applications for employment in the care sector in the future, if they decide that this is their chosen profession. As you know, Mr Speaker, it is anticipated that the Care Agency will continue to deliver this course for up to a further 100 people in the coming year.

As you will be aware, Government will be operating two new elderly residential facilities by the end of  
680 the year. In order to operate these services we will need staff, and we are therefore pre-empting the need for staff by commencing to offer training in this field as well as hands-on work experience, and this will avoid having to do what the GSD had to do where they had to import labour in the care sector because of apparent lack of skill in our workforce. So, unlike the GSD when they were in office, we are tackling this issue head-on and we are co-ordinating our approach. Their excuse, Mr Speaker, when asked why residents were never  
685 considered for employment in the care sector, was that locals did not want to carry out this type of work. That, statistics show, Mr Speaker, is far from the case, judging from the number of residents who have already either undertaken training or taken up employment in this field both by the Care Agency and private contractors. Mr Speaker, it is about giving the people the tools and the opportunity to carry out the jobs. Incidentally, a lot of the people who have undergone the training have already secured employment in the  
690 care sector: a continued investment in Gibraltar's care and in Gibraltar's employment.

Furthermore, the Care Agency continues to offer ETCL and GRAD trainees the opportunity to have on-the-job training and experience, giving them the potential to apply for a vacancy within the Care Agency after gaining the necessary skills to undertake the work. Since this initiative commenced, we have already employed in the Care Agency 63 people who started their placement in the Care Agency either through  
695 ETCL or the GRAD scheme: another success story, Mr Speaker.

I will turn to the different services of the Care Agency. Starting with Elderly Residential Services, one of the major achievements this year has been the fruition of negotiations with Unite the Union in relation to the nursing and nursing allied professionals who work in Elderly Residential Services of the Care Agency – essentially what used to be the Elderly Care Agency prior to the merge in 2009. Care Agency staff working  
700 in this sector were transferred to the GHA effective from 1st November 2013 and now enjoy parity with

their GHA counterparts on the basis of equal pay for equal work. Staff are deployed to the Care Agency under the management of the Elderly Residential Services.

In this process, the new agreement of Agenda for Change has been applied to all Elderly Care nursing staff and this claim was ongoing for over four years, ignored by the previous administration. I must take the opportunity to thank all from the Care Agency and Unite who formed part of the working group; the Care Agency and GHA management, who enabled the smooth transition of the process; and particularly the Care Agency finance team, who calculated the payment of arrears in record time.

The new regime has had a positive impact on the working conditions of this collective. Subsequently, the restructure of the nursing workforce supposes an increment of the hours of care provided for the elderly. It must be noted that since these new working shifts, post the commencement of the new working arrangements, there has been a significant decrease in the need for overtime, if at all. So while there has been an increase in expenditure due to the increase in salaries, there have also been very significant savings.

Yearly updates on mandatory training for nursing staff are being carried out as part of their continuous development. Collaboration with GHA professionals has been maintained since last year, providing in-house training in many different areas of nursing for Elderly Care staff. In addition to that, accredited modules run through the School of Health Studies and have been available for Elderly Care nursing staff. Furthermore, in conjunction with the School of Health Studies and the GHA librarian, there is a project to open a nursing library in Mount Alvernia, in order to improve the resources available for the nursing collective of Elderly Care.

Charge nurses and team leaders have attended to a leadership and management course, something which had never been done before in this service, Mr Speaker. There has been a campaign of awareness on safeguarding adults at risk, organised by professionals from the GHA and in collaboration with the Safeguarding Adults Committee. A further basic awareness course on safeguarding adults is ongoing at present for frontline professionals of both organisations.

A rotation of charge nurses on night duty has been implemented, providing a support and supervision framework of the night duties of the nursing staff. Satellite services, such as John Cochrane Ward, Calpe Ward and the Jewish Home, now receive nightly visits of a charge nurse, something that had never occurred before – the premises was run by the staff at night with no support from nursing management.

All policies are under review, Mr Speaker, with an aim of updating all procedures throughout the Elderly Residential Service.

As from March 2014, a speech and language therapist has been allocated to Elderly Services. This is an achievement, as in the past the residents requiring assessment had to wait for weeks, even months, before they were assessed by these professionals.

In our service, Mr Speaker, we do not only care for the residents; we also care for their relatives, and we have arranged for two informative sessions for relatives of people suffering from dementia to be organised at Mount Alvernia with the support of GHA health professionals. It has been an innovative, successful and welcomed initiative and will continue during this year on a regular basis.

Finally, I cannot talk about Mount Alvernia without referring to the iconic structure that has been in place for 10 years. I am, of course, referring to the scaffolding, which was initially erected to repair those balconies 10 years ago but has been in place so long, Mr Speaker, that the scaffolding itself has dilapidated and required replacement and the deterioration of the balconies is such that the scaffolding is now supporting the balconies. But I am delighted to announce that the balconies are finally being renovated and the works will be ready by the end of this month. Once complete, not only will this enhance the façade of the building, but also the quality of life of the residents, who will be able to gain access to them after so many years and be able to enjoy the spectacular views which has been blocked from them up to now because of the scaffolding. The retaining wall on the east side of Mount Alvernia will also be repaired after years of requests and being ignored.

Our elderly care facilities are being expanded and this will enhance the care that can be provided in the future. The RNH residential facility for people with dementia will be ready by the end of the year and we have already opened a new facility at the John Mackintosh Home, albeit partially at the moment. At present, it provides for residents of the Jewish Home on a temporary basis while this facility is being refurbished, and in addition there are 10 long-term patients from the GHA. The service is under constant review, of course, to ensure that all provisions and requirements for the welfare and safety of its occupants are met. A complete new approach to the concept of the building was required after the fiasco and waste of money incurred by the previous Government, causing delay to the works and therefore to its opening. Professionals from both the GHA and Elderly Care Services have worked together to make this project viable, safe and secure for service users. Once the Jewish Home residents are relocated to the refurbished Jewish Home, there will be a total of 54 residential beds available to the elderly.

The much needed refurbishment of the Jewish Home is now forthcoming. The building requires a full refurbishment due to the sorry state that it presents and inherited from the lack of action of the previous administration – because that is what happens to buildings, Mr Speaker, when they are not maintained and

they are not kept up: they just dilapidate, and then repairs become more expensive. But at least we are getting on with it. The Jewish community will, of course, have an input in the design and works to be carried out to the building to ensure that their requirements are met.

765 Before I turn to the other services of the Care Agency, I must give credit to the Nursing Co-ordinator and her team, who have been at the forefront of the transition process and have made the opening of the new facility at John Mackintosh Wing possible. (A Member: Hear, hear.)

770 Turning to Social Services, Mr Speaker, as you may know, this is comprised of four teams: Children and Families, Adults, Drug Rehabilitation, and Probation and Disabilities. I can now state with pride that for the first time ever in the history of Social Services, the complement of social workers will be fully filled by September this year, bearing in mind that our complement of social workers is now higher than it has ever been.

775 We have entered into an agreement with a recruitment agency in the UK, which has enabled a faster response in the recruitment process. The days when it took an extraordinary length of time to recruit are now over. Let me add that, in the interim and while vacancies are being filled substantively, we have engaged supply cover until the recruitment is achieved so that the service is not affected and does not suffer.

780 We have also, in this financial year, added four new posts to enable newly qualified social workers to come into the service. This new post will provide that they be supervised in a programme of training; supervision that will equip them to apply for jobs as social workers as soon as they have acquired the necessary experience. The professional development continues with increased training for social workers.

785 One of the strategic priorities for this year has been investment in holistic procedures that will incorporate all authorities involved in social care. These procedures will be produced for three of the services: Children and Families, Adults, and the Residential Service. The procedures will ensure the safeguarding of our vulnerable people in a co-ordinated manner that all agencies can follow. It is envisaged that this project should be completed by the end of this financial year. This will depend on how the consolidation of all existing procedures and adaptation to legal advancements is affected.

790 I want to emphasise, Mr Speaker, that a lot of the advancements and positive developments we have now achieved in Social Services are as a result of working on an inter-agency basis and we have now been able to formalise good working relationships with the Health Authority, the Department of Education and in particular the Royal Gibraltar Police and their Safeguarding Unit, and the benefits of this are *very, very* apparent.

Let me now explain the different roles and what we are achieving within each of the services.

795 The Children and Families team is comprised of a number of different services providing for children and their families when in need. The main ethos of this service is that children thrive when loved and cared for, and generally this is within a family unit. Early intervention is essential so as to ensure that children do not need placements outside their homes. Although safeguarding and child protection is usually what gets into the public arena, it is the work that is now invested into the early stages that ensures that families move on from crises and resolve their difficulties. Mr Speaker, we are now changing our strategy, in terms of  
800 child protection, and focusing our resources on and emphasising preventing crises from happening, because early intervention avoids family breakdown, criminality, domestic abuse and substance misuse, among other things; and that is why we are investing in this process. Allowing for this approach will prevent further pressure on a range of services such as care, health and education.

805 In keeping with our early intervention strategy we have introduced an additional service – the Parent and Child Parenting Assessment Programme. This serves both as an assessment and as a programme whereby the parent can acquire the necessary skills to be able to care for their child at a good enough level, and in some cases avoid the child entering the care system altogether.

810 Mr Speaker, as part of the restructure of Social Services following our review we have introduced a duty team, and this is a first point of contact for referrals. This year, we have seen a growth post of a social work manager in this team. This has enabled the development of databases to gather information so as to highlight the trends within society and where the needs lie.

815 A new initiative this year has been the development of a protocol and a database for domestic abuse. This has highlighted families where this is a common occurrence and intervention is required. However, it has also helped identify families where the difficulty has begun to arise, and support is offered so couples can learn to resolve their issues without this impacting on their children. As part of the development of the Agency's domestic abuse strategy, a new initiative – something that never occurred to the GSD when they were in office: two social workers and the Agency's psychologist will attend a training programme so as to deliver workshops with victims of domestic violence. They will also deliver the work with the perpetrators of domestic abuse. It is no longer good enough to safeguard and protect victims and their children. We have  
820 recognised that the perpetrators continue to act out behaviour that they have learnt and punishment in itself is not the only solution. These perpetrators will continue to act on their behaviours and continue to be parents, and they must be assisted in making the necessary changes and breaking the cycle. We have our

long-term team, as we change the focus from reactive to preventative, and we are developing what we do in the long-term team.

825 We are also in the process of a complete review of the Fostering and Adoption Service, and there is now a dedicated adoption and fostering social worker. This service is now offering support to pre-adoption placements, pre-adoptive parents and foster carers. Support provided is in terms of one-to-one, and formal training and supervision will be offered shortly as part of development within the service. Furthermore, people who sit on the Adoption and Fostering Panel will receive training at the end of this year, so that they  
830 can meet the competences required to perform their duties.

The Court Welfare Team continues to advise the courts on children's issues relating to their parents' separation. The parenting programme is currently under review so as ensure that meeting the needs in terms of parenting changes as the needs of our society changes.

835 We have introduced a new service, and this is a respite service for children with disabilities following an assessment. This is offered by way of care packages in the community or, when necessary, residential care.

A working party has been established in order to carry out a review of the residential services. This review will provide information on two critical issues. The principal issue is that of how we are caring for children and whether the model being used is the better option. This review will also look at the issue of resourcing and the management structure. A working party has been formed for this purpose and will be  
840 looking at all aspects and issues relating to children with challenging behaviour as well.

The Adult Services Department of Social Services has been able to focus on services for the most vulnerable adults in our community through the one point of referral system, which was introduced when we came into office. Management of the one-point entry system into elderly care, to include domiciliary care, day centres and residential care, has proved to be extremely successful and has provided care needed  
845 to the most vulnerable clients in our community when they are in need of support, without the creation of endless waiting lists. There is now a needs-led criteria when considering who is most in need of the service. From 1st April 2013 to 31st March, the Adult team received a total of 540 referrals from people, ranging from professionals in different agencies to neighbours and concerned people in the community. Referrals have increased by 119 from the previous year alone. This number is increasing on a monthly basis as our  
850 community realise services offered by Social Services are no longer stagnant but available to everyone who really needs them. I am pleased to say that the new systems implemented continue to ensure that all services are allocated in a fair and equitable way, based on each person's individual health and social care support needs.

855 The services being provided for the elderly in our community continue to be developed and increased at a significant and dramatic rate. This year, there have been a total of 53 admissions to Mount Alvernia, Cochrane Ward and Calpe Ward. Of these, 22 were people in the community who were at high risk and required admission to avoid a serious incident or hospitalisation, and 31 were admitted from hospital after being deemed to be long-stay patients unable to return home as they required 24-hour care. The change introduced by us to the admissions criteria has resulted in the most needy people being admitted first,  
860 regardless of their time on the waiting list.

Domiciliary care services continue to be provided by two providers, and an additional 125 people have been granted domiciliary care this year. This means that by the end of the financial year we are providing domiciliary care to 229 people – more than *trebling* the number of people who are provided with this service since we came into office, because at that point only 75 people were receiving this service.  
865 (*Banging on desks*) Additionally, 51 people already in receipt of domiciliary care were granted further hours. I am proud to say that we are providing more domiciliary care than ever, so many vulnerable people are benefitting from this initiative.

870 The newly introduced reviewing service for domiciliary care is working well. The new reviewing officer also carries out a quality assurance role, which helps the Agency keep checks on the private providers, ensuring the clients receive the best possible care.

The Agency is now working seamlessly with colleagues in the GHA. Out of the new domiciliary care recipients, 74 people were awarded care packages in order to expedite discharge from hospital and their recovery and integration in the community. This, together with increased admissions into Mount Alvernia, have reduced the amount of long-stay patients in hospital, which before would have blocked hospital beds  
875 as people would have been unable to survive in the community without support.

Social workers now attend hospital multi-disciplinary team meetings on a weekly basis and support the discharge planning process by assessing patient needs and putting packages of care in place that will meet the patients' needs to prevent future readmissions into hospital.

880 Mr Speaker, I am very proud to say that the new day centre, which we promised in our first year of office, is now fully operational and is providing a service to so many elderly people in the community. (*Banging on desks*) This purpose-built day centre is certainly one of the jewels in the crown of the Care Agency. It provides a therapeutic and welcoming environment for the elderly, who otherwise would be isolated in the community. It provides a service that also monitors their needs on a weekly basis and



885 becomes a point of quick referral to social workers if their circumstances change and they require more support.

890 Five social workers from the Adult team have been trained in investigating officer and safeguarding lead manager roles within the safeguarding adult at risk procedures. Social workers have had placements in the UK on hospital discharge and assessments of care packages in the community. Social workers have trained in conjunction with the Royal Gibraltar Police in order to become designated risk managers of sexual offenders in Gibraltar and be part of the Gibraltar public protection arrangements and support other departments in the management of high risk offenders. And here is where the Social Services' close working relationship with the police is particularly important, Mr Speaker.

895 Social Services Adult team now have 137 clients receiving a quick response service. They are being contacted on a monthly basis by the Elderly Needs Co-ordinator and are being monitored through phone calls and police visits. This ensures that the most vulnerable in our community are not at risk, and this is another fantastic new initiative that we have introduced, Mr Speaker.

900 Turning to the Disability Service, this service has greatly improved. I said so last year and explained why, and we have improved again this year. We have worked on the objectives set down in our business plan last year with the aim of carrying out greater improvements and to develop the standard and quality of care at the Dr Giraldi Home and St Bernadette's resource centre.

905 Once again, we have embarked on a robust training programme to further develop employees professionally on extensive in-house and external training courses undertaken during this year. For example, during the period April 2012 to March 2013, training was undertaken by 161 members of staff and a total of 286 hours of training provided; but this year, training was attended by 497 members of staff and it amounted to 624 hours. This represents a total increase of training by 300%, Mr Speaker, and that is year to year in our administration. If we were to compare it to the little or no training provided before 2011, the comparative statistics are just shocking.

910 All medication, environmental and documentation audits have been reviewed, and these are now carried out on a monthly basis so as to flag up any issues which may arise and they can be addressed quickly. I am pleased to inform that the outcome of the last Environmental Agency visit at the Dr Giraldi Home in February was that everything was found to be in good order, to the extent that, for the first time ever, there was no submission of any advice or comment for improvement.

915 Our liaison strategy with the various Government Departments is now established and is producing very positive results, particularly in the professional relationship with the GHA and the Royal Gibraltar Police. In fact, we have provided training to the Royal Gibraltar Police on how to deal with people with learning disabilities. We continue to network with other Government Departments, as well as with other different groups and societies. This has created a strong and effective communication route with the following societies.

920 Additionally, parents and relatives are well informed of what is happening and have easy access to the service and to managers. By introducing monthly meetings with parents and relatives, held at St Bernadette's, families are kept informed and have an opportunity to provide feedback.

The home has also been refurbished recently, Mr Speaker, and we have also introduced a further flat so as to be able to increase the respite facilities that we can offer.

925 We now have a structured programme of activities in order to enrich the service users' social environment and we encourage them to engage in meaningful activities in the community. They are undertaking numerous activities, which are too long to list but they include things like weekly drama sessions at Bayside, attending supported holidays of their choice and participating in various charity events; but importantly, Mr Speaker, residents from Dr Giraldi and service users of St Bernadette's are now undertaking work placements supported by staff. This is a *very* important initiative, which gives them confidence and a structure to their day. In fact, we have two service users... Sorry, Mr Speaker, we have six service users who are currently in part-time employment.

935 This year, we have had an increase in admissions to both St Bernadette's resource centre and to Dr Giraldi, both to the residential service as well as the respite service, and we have therefore had to accommodate these growing needs. We have, very importantly, also developed a transitional policy for the transitional pathway for children with learning disabilities moving into adult services. This has been done in conjunction with Social Services and the Department of Education. We have also spent the last year concentrating on developing policies for staff at Dr Giraldi and St Bernadette's, so that everybody is clear on the framework within which they have to operate.

940 I am particularly grateful to everyone who works in the disability service, because of the huge improvements that they have achieved in the service during the year.

Now turning to the final department of Social Services, and that is drug rehabilitation. This past year has seen considerable investment in the physical fabric of Bruce's Farm Rehabilitation Centre. The facilities have already seen a significant transformation, which has enhanced the safe and comfortable therapeutic environment we aim to create for people suffering from various forms of addictions, which will make it

945 more conducive to their successful recovery. However, this by itself would be futile if we had not addressed the underlying causes which were preventing many people from accessing treatment.

We have worked hard to simplify the onerous and archaic systems and processes that prospective applicants had to contend with in the past – cumbersome procedures that had never been given any thought by the previous administration. Now, all agencies that link into drug treatment from Social Services work together to ensure that applications from anyone wishing to be admitted to Bruce’s Farm are dealt with expeditiously.

The results of the changes we have introduced speak for themselves. Since 2012, admissions to Bruce’s Farm have increased year on year. In fact, in 2013, Bruce’s Farm saw 49 admissions; the highest number in 10 years, Mr Speaker, and over double the number of admissions in 2011. That is how badly the old Bruce’s Farm, managed by the GSD administration, was failing people with addiction problems in our community. *(Interjection by Hon. S M Figueras)* No, absolutely; I agree, Mr Figueras. Yes, I agree; particularly in the field of Social Services, I have to say.

I recently announced that we have re-established formal contacts with Broadway Lodge – *(Interjection by Hon. S M Figueras)* Mr Speaker, perhaps Mr Figueras might want to refrain from scoring own goals, because if he invites me to comment on the GSD’s track record in Social Services I am happy to do so, but I would rather carry on with my speech. I recently announced that we have re-established formal contacts with Broadway Lodge, one of the longest-established and respected rehabilitation centres in the UK. This has opened a new and exciting chapter in the transformation of Bruce’s Farm. We are currently working on developing a partnership, which will include staff training, consultancy and staff placements.

I have always advocated for the inclusion of the voluntary sector and ex-service users as important stakeholders in how the service develops, and since assuming office my open-door policy towards groups such as Families, Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous has yielded very real and positive results. During our refurbishment, numerous members of these groups have given of their time to undertake voluntary work within Bruce’s Farm; something that rarely happened in the past. In my maiden budget speech, Mr Speaker, I referred to Bruce’s Farm as being out of sight and out of mind, and clearly this is no longer the case.

I would like to announce today a new initiative that we will be introducing at Bruce’s Farm, and that will be a top-up admission service, available to people who are in recovery, similar to a weekend retreat. It will be offered to anyone who wishes to take it up having undergone the 12-step programme, and the aim of this is to provide continued support to avoid relapse. In the past, I have referred to how we need to develop our community and outreach support for those who are unable to commit to the residential rehabilitation model for various reasons, and over the past year we have firmly established such a service, which is operated by two counsellors from Bruce’s Farm who operate for part of their week from the Gladys Perez Centre. They provide an invaluable service not only for those who complete treatment but for those who suffer from the fallout of addiction, particularly their families.

One important and very significant development has been the addition of one further counsellor, who will be based within the community on a full-time basis. This additional post will also enable us to provide a service to the prison, where we will be able to roll out a comprehensive rehabilitation programme for the first time ever. This has created additional rehabilitation routes to complement the work undertaken at Bruce’s Farm and will make decisive in-roads in addressing the well documented link between drugs and crime, which I referred to in my last Budget speech.

On the drugs awareness front, we have continued to work closely with statutory and official bodies, including law enforcement and various sporting associations. There are many events that the Care Agency has sponsored where the anti-drugs message has literally reached thousands of children. This includes the Mini-Olympiads in partnership with the Royal Gibraltar Police, as well as other events throughout the past year, such as football, basketball and volleyball tournaments.

The public will also become familiar with our high-profile campaigns that we have conducted with the Royal Gibraltar Police to address issues of concern, such as binge drinking, and at peak periods such as National Day and Christmas.

Our ongoing drug awareness workshops in all educational establishments from middle schools onwards have continued over the past year. The Care Agency has worked in close partnership with the very dedicated team at the Royal Gibraltar Police and recovering addicts to great effect to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people who may be exposed to the risk of drugs.

At a strategic level, members of the Drug Strategy Working Group, formed last year and led by myself, have continued to work together. We have attended key conferences in Strasbourg and Brussels at EU level, where we have established valuable contacts with the leading figures in various areas that will inform how we will develop our strategic responses to the challenges posed by drugs within our community. So far, Mr Speaker, this year our priority has been in getting our facilities and the services that we deliver right, so that we can now progress to working on these matters at a more strategic level.

1005 Finally on the point of drugs, I would also like to announce that the Care Agency will be introducing a  
 substance abuse policy for staff. We provide a service where we care for the most vulnerable, and we  
 cannot risk that anyone be under the influence of either alcohol or drugs. More importantly, the policy is  
 not aimed at catching people out, but rather offering support where people have an addiction problem. That  
 is why it is imperative that resources such as Bruce's Farm and the Community Counselling Service work,  
 1010 as these services will offer support.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I am responsible for the funding of many charities and community bodies. I would  
 like to refer to the Clubhouse, and I will echo what the Minister for Health said yesterday on the wonderful  
 job this organisation is doing. We work very closely with them and support them. Last year, we provided  
 them with temporary accommodation and rescued them from the dilapidating premises they had been  
 1015 allocated at Toc H, which quite frankly were abysmal, and this has made all the difference to the people to  
 whom they provide a service, but we are working together towards other premises.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those charities and community organisations who work  
 with me. I will not list them all, given that there are so many. Because they know that my door is always  
 open, I am grateful for the meaningful engagement as we progress to improve services in consultation  
 together, and I would also like to thank both unions for the work that we have done together this past year.  
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Mr Speaker, this Budget shows a real investment in services with tangible results, but the job is not easy  
 as I am still dealing with many skeletons and gaps and problems inherited in the service. But a lot of  
 progress has been made, and this is thanks to the dynamic teams that work with me and support me. Were it  
 not for them, the changes and improvements to the service that I have referred to would not have been  
 1025 possible. I particularly want to thank the team in my ministerial office for all the work that they do  
 continuously.

Mr Speaker, we will not lose sight of all that still needs to be done and we will not take our foot off the  
 pedal. It is full speed ahead for us as we continue to meet all our manifesto commitments, as well as  
 develop other necessary initiatives. Mr Speaker, we will continue to deliver. *(Applause and banging on*  
 1030 *desks)*

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Isobel Ellul-Hammond.

**A Member:** Hear, hear. *(Banging on desks)*

1035 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to address Parliament on the  
 Budget for the third time as Opposition Spokesman for Health, Social Services and Civil Contingencies. It  
 is a duty and an honour for us on the Opposition benches to contribute to and vote on this vital discharge of  
 the responsibility of Parliament.

1040 Firstly, it is with an air of sadness that I shall broach the subject of the City Fire Brigade, and I find that  
 I have to very precisely repeat my Budget message of last year on the non-delivery of three key manifesto  
 commitments.

One, a new much-needed relocated fire station, where again there is no budgetary provision for it in this  
 year's financial Estimates Book; but at least, Mr Speaker, we have a new park!

1045 Two, the implementation of the review by Sir Ken Knight, the UK Government's Chief Fire and Rescue  
 Adviser, of a new vision for the holistic operation and management of Gibraltar's Fire Service. Let us not  
 forget that, despite all the Government's proclamations on publishing reports and transparency, we are still  
 waiting, 19 months later, to see this audit review report of the City Fire Brigade which Sir Ken Knight  
 conducted. And it ill behoves the Chief Minister to have chastised us at the last Budget about raising  
 1050 concerns for their non-publication of this report, and five others which they have still kept secret. The  
 Members of the Government benches used to make sustained political play of the GSD Government's  
 omission to publish the whole of the King Report. However, Mr Speaker, it appears once more that this is a  
 case of 'do as I say and not as I do.' **(A Member:** Hear, hear.) This Government continues to refuse to  
 publish reports commissioned by them and paid for by the taxpayer. So much for the new dawn,  
 1055 Mr Speaker!

And three, what about the delay in going live with the medical priority dispatch system – an essential  
 pre scoop-of-the-patient triage system which will ensure that emergency ambulances are not called to  
 incidents that are not emergencies, thus depriving those who really need them? This has lately become an  
 all-too-regular occurrence. We have many reports of incidents where ambulances are called out to non-  
 1060 emergencies in order for patients to get seen quickly at A&E, avoiding the unfortunately extremely long  
 waiting times which might otherwise be encountered. We also have reports, Mr Speaker, of genuine  
 emergency patients having spent up to half an hour calling for an ambulance because all three are  
 unavailable attending to other patients.

1065 All these crucial commitments are still pending and still wanting – and I say 'sadly' because every fire  
 officer and employee from the Department I have spoken to is deeply disappointed and disillusioned by the

empty promises of this Government. Our City Fire Service is a vital service. It is an essential service in our community (A Member: Hear, hear.) and they deserve better, but are ultimately being failed by the Government that – let’s not forget – offered all things to all men. (A Member: Hear, hear.)

1070 No surprises there then, because alas, Mr Speaker, it could well be that the GSLP Liberal alliance considers that window-dressing our city (A Member: Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) and spending money on vanity projects, such as the £4 million on refurbishing No. 6 Convent Place, are more important priorities in the grand scheme of the Government’s limited vision.

1075 **Hon. D A Feetham:** A Venetian palace!

**Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** But at least, Mr Speaker, as you may have already heard, we have a new park!

1080 With regard to the Health Services in Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, I must firstly commend the clinical team, who have so successfully expanded and improved upon the day surgery unit at St Bernard’s Hospital. More resources and a new, enhanced care system have resulted in an efficient and problem-free experience for patients. Well done, GHA.

1085 The estimated budget of the GHA for this financial year now stands at £101.6 million. In just three years, the Health budget has increased by £12.4 million, an increase of around 14%. One might argue that, in itself, this is not unreasonable – that it shows investment in our community’s health services. This would be fine had it been planned, but the reality is that the increase was neither planned nor controlled. Spending for this past financial year, 2013-14, has gone over budget by £5 million, Mr Speaker; one of the 24 Government heads which have gone over their budgeted estimates and suffered from the poor financial oversight by the relevant Ministers because, Mr Speaker, throwing money at problems without thinking through the consequences is how this Government is managing our public finances. (*Banging on desks*) (A Member: Hear, hear.) (A Member: Yes!) Five million pounds over budget, Mr Speaker; no mean sum, especially when I quote the Hon. the Minister for Health from his Budget speech last year, who said, and I quote:

‘For many years... there has been a managerial failure to control spending leading to constant overspends of millions... this Government expects expenditure to be controlled and I have taken steps to ensure that this is the case.’

1095 So what happened, Mr Speaker? A £5 million overspend, which contributes to the £50 million over estimate spend this last year by all Government Departments, Agencies and Authorities together. And as the Leader of the Opposition pointed out, in order to keep these expensive Departments running, with nearly 600 extra public servants employed these last two and a half years, recurrent expenditure now stands at £95.6 million more than in the 2011-12 financial year when this Government came into power. And, Mr Speaker, *no había dinero!* This is the Government that said (*Interjection*) there was no money, that Gibraltar’s public finances were in a ruinous state.

1100 **Hon. D A Feetham:** The big lie!

1105 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** Does the Government think the electorate is stupid? Is it the miraculous hand of God which has provided so bountifully (*Laughter*) since this Government came into power, or are they pursuing a relentless and populous stratagem which will mortgage the next few generations of Gibraltarians? (*Banging on desks*) (Several Members: Hear, hear.)

1110 And on the subject of financial management, for a Minister who claims he is listening to his staff, he is obviously not listening well enough to his Finance Director. On several occasions and at several GHA board meetings, the GHA finance chief has raised concerns that the senior structure at his directorate, and I quote, ‘lacks the necessary robustness’ to guarantee the proper accountability of a budget that now runs at over £100 million. A lot of management restructuring to get rid of the non-locals or GSD supporters, but little focus on succession planning for the crucial Department, necessary to ensure budgetary control in order to avoid an overspend of £5 million.

1115 Mr Speaker, I must emphasise that the Health budget represents about 20% of this community’s annual recurrent expenditure: one fifth of everything this Government spends. Lack of budgetary control has a very significant impact on overall Government expenditure.

**Hon. J J Netto:** Get rid of the finance Minister!

1120 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** Let us examine in closer detail where this over-expenditure is occurring.

Sponsored patients saw a £1.9 million overspend this year, and spending is up 30% since the Hon. Minister took over the running of the GHA. But of course they have a manifesto commitment to implement, which includes, and I quote:

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‘We will completely review the sponsored patient mechanism.’

and the solution to this is that now you can go for treatment to any hospital you wish outside of Gibraltar. In two years, the GHA has sent sponsored patients to 89 different hospitals outside of Gibraltar, Mr Speaker; 79 of which the GHA has no service level agreement with. This means it is very difficult to keep track on patients or vouch for appropriate standards, apart from anecdotal evidence, of course. And of those 79 hospitals the GHA has no service level agreements with, 21 are private hospitals. Private hospitals, Mr Speaker! GHA clinicians are baffled that we are paying over the standard National Health rate to send 114 patients, or patient episodes, to these private hospitals for little clinical reason at all. These private hospitals offer care that could be offered here, or in one of our tried and tested 10 hospitals the GHA has service level agreements with. Why would the Minister allow this new approach in the management of sponsored patients to develop, Mr Speaker?

We are also paying Xanit private hospital in Benalmádena over £¼ million a month for a service which St Bernard’s Hospital could offer by bringing in, as Xanit does, the clinical specialist from the Campo de Gibraltar and Costa area needed to treat the patients on the day. It is ludicrous that we should be paying such private healthcare rates when we could be keeping our patients in Gibraltar and bringing the specialists to them at St. Bernard’s Hospital, rather than continuing to send critical patients to Xanit. What could the GHA do to buy in clinical services for over £¼ million a month?

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Economies of scale are not a forte of this Government, Mr Speaker. Spending money indiscriminately, whether it is sustainable or not, is more their style; a style lacking in courage and unnecessarily costly to our community. But at least, Mr Speaker, we have a new park and we will get a small boats marina for the bargain price of £24 million (*Laughter*) – *y no había dinero*, Mr Speaker!

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The GHA spends around £30,000 per month outside of Gibraltar for specialist imaging, such as MRIs, PET, bone density and antenatal scans. Could it not be better used in training a few of our youngsters in these radiography fields, to purchase the necessary equipment ourselves and employ another radiologist for our own in-house imaging services? We presently have to subject our citizens to tiresome trips to Spain for regular scanning and MRIs because of the lack of vision to provide such essential services here at £30,000 a month. Financial planning and foresight is necessary, Mr Speaker: those economies of scale again.

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The Health Minister, last year in his Budget speech, said that the GHA staff was healing from low morale from a lack of past GSD leadership. It would seem, Mr Speaker, that this healing is happening at an almost imperceptible rate. The Minister will be dismayed to learn that despite his efforts, including a couple of... shall we call them ‘entertaining’ appearances on the steps of St Bernard’s Hospital for the GBC open day, staff morale is reported to us as being lower than ever and a general malaise, stemming from the realisation that nothing much is changing, is setting in. You see, Mr Speaker, there are several indicators of an unhappy staff; a staff which is unable to shake off deep-seated discontent. They are rates of sickness and absence; the number of complaints made by the public; whether the staff are consulted in shaping their management and how top heavy management is; and the ability to recruit and retain specialist clinical staff.

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A review of information provided by and described by the Minister as ‘of little benefit’ and ‘for no apparent effect’ in response to Questions I asked at the last session of Parliament in May, has revealed that sickness rates for all employees of the GHA is up from 2012 to 2013. In order to provide some context and better enable the electorate to assess the extent of the malaise at the GHA, according to local leading human resources specialists, the average acceptable number of days’ sick leave in a year for a private sector employee is 4.4. This is set as a golden standard to benchmark against. Mr Speaker, to highlight the point, in 2013 the GHA administration and support staff each suffered an average of 11.4 days’ sick leave a year. Medical and allied health professionals suffered 12.4 days off sick, and nurses 15.5 days off each on average for the year. The total number of days lost to sick leave during 2013 was 14,825; 14,825 days of paying for cover, or where the public missed out on a service. Including the whole of the GHA staff, that makes an average of 16 days a year missed by every GHA employee, compared to a golden standard of 4.4. These figures take into account uncertified leave, short-term and long-term sick leave. The picture is indeed grim, Mr Speaker.

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Another indicator to show whether our Health Service is healing are complaints from the public. The number of formal and informal complaints is indicative of public satisfaction with the GHA, and if you look at the statistics there are no vast improvements or a reduction in complaints these last two years. In fact, 2014 has got off to a shaky start for the first five months with the number of formal complaints already reaching nearly half the number that were recorded for the whole of 2013. The number of informal

1170 complaints for the first five months of 2014 are at 68; 76% of the number of recorded informal complaints for the whole of 2013.

1175 Despite sickness rates and complaints, the GSD's manifesto commitment for a new GHA management structure has been implemented. This was to be the answer to all of the GHA's problems. The hon. Members opposite finally got their way. They got a new GHA management, which conveniently removed the three non-Gibraltarian and one local executive members whom they had pinpointed when in opposition as wanting out of the GHA management team, irrespective of whether they were doing a good job or not. So now we have an even more top heavy management, Mr Speaker, with a Chief Executive who is not contracted to deliver on specific targets within a time frame – and this is not about the individual chosen; it is about holding the Chief Executive of the largest community budget to account, answerable to the GHA board.

1180 An extra operational layer of three unit general managers has been added to the GHA's management structure, plus an extra group of managers for clinical and corporate governance; all added to the existing GHA senior management team. And let's not mention the new GHA Strategy Development Group – a new management structure, Mr Speaker, which came from a £130,000 review, the report of which is still pending for publication and public scrutiny 19 months later; another report held in secret, Mr Speaker; a review of the GHA under new management which was set up in secret, with little or no consultation with clinical staff, only with a select few and imposed on GHA staff, despite their having no sight of the review report themselves, without the possibility to contribute.

1185 Another indicator of a sick GHA which is not healing is how well it can recruit and retain clinical staff. When the GSLP Liberals were in Opposition, they made much stock of the fact that the GHA, under the management of the GSD, was spending large amounts on locum or relief cover. Mr Speaker may find it interesting that the estimate for spending on relief cover this year is £2 million, the same as the amount actually spent in 2011-12. (A Member: Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) The Hon. the Chief Minister, in his Budget response last year, accused my analysis of being incorrect with regard to locum cover, while defending his Government's spend of £1.5 million that year; but it is creeping up again, Mr Speaker. Is this an indication that the Government's alleged success in turning the GHA around is attracting clinical specialists to work in Gibraltar and retaining them, or is the reality that they continue to face difficulties attracting doctors and nurses to work in Gibraltar?

1190 One thing is for sure, Mr Speaker: if this Government wants its people in key positions or has to honour promised promotions or positions for services rendered or because of family connections, they will do so. Having moved the goalposts for promotion after the vacancy notice for one district charge nurse, the Minister or another Minister ensured that all three applicants were given the promotion, even though it was not clinically indicated, making the service top heavy with 30% of the district nursing staff as managers. Why? Cronyism, Mr Speaker – the GSLP logo, (A Member: Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) a pattern we see repeated on the GHA complaints review panel and in every Government Department, Agency and Authority. By denying other GHA staff the right to apply for what turned out to be three jobs in community nursing, the GSLP Liberal Government ensured that one of their supporters would get the job, of course at the expense of the taxpayer. (A Member: Shame! Shame!)

1200 So one must ask how the GHA is building a reputation for itself so it can attract new clinical staff. Well, unfortunately, we do not have enough Gibraltarians to fill the entire specialist clinical roles of the GHA, so advertising for these positions continues to be carried out outside of Gibraltar. For example, we have 16 specialist nursing positions presently vacant, where advertising for them will have to go outside of Gibraltar, as we do for doctors. Yet nursing and other GHA contracts of non-locals are being terminated after four years of work, disregarding any verbal or written contracts entered into with them under a GSD Government.

1215 We are extremely concerned by the GHA's stance and pernicious policy, and equally that of the Care Agency, towards contract and supply workers with reference to variation, termination of contracts, length of short-term contracts, permanent and pensionable status and gratuities. Employment rights are changing. Employees are being targeted and discriminated against as the 9th December has become the new 1st July law. The way staff – especially experienced and well qualified specialist nurses on contracts – are being treated is causing stress and anxiety among their work colleagues and morale is at an all-time low: that unhealed malaise I mentioned earlier, Mr Speaker.

1220 New working arrangements are being imposed without consultation or taking into consideration the interests of the patients who use the service. Most of the employees affected by the policy of this parochial and short-sighted Government are nurses in theatre, ICU, mental health and paediatrics. A continued exodus or cull of these specialists, fed up with this overly nationalistic and xenophobic policy, will have serious and detrimental consequences on the delivery of the high standards of care for the most vulnerable patients, potentially putting them at risk by replacing them with inexperienced staff, which undermines the available skill mix and will have serious consequences on the way we care for our patients and on manning

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1230 levels. This is where we can foresee problems in retaining staff or recruiting new ones into these short, insecure contracts; something which has already been happening in the Care Agency with care workers.

The behaviour of this so-called ‘socialist’ Government towards non-local EU contract workers, who have demonstrated a high level of professionalism, expertise and commitment to our Health Service and Care Agency, is disgraceful and shows little regard for the welfare of workers, Mr Speaker. (A Member: Hear, hear.) (A Member: Yes!) (*Banging on desks*) If Gibraltarians working in any EU nation in which they planned to make their home were treated in this way, we would be protesting *en masse* outside of Parliament in Brussels, Mr Speaker.

1240 The Budget session is the opportunity for Ministers to laud what has been achieved in their Ministry the previous financial year and to promote their next lot of policies or initiatives for the financial year to come, supported by an estimated Budget, which is then approved by Parliament. So let’s go back to last year’s Budget to see if Dr Cortes managed to deliver on all he promised; or were they just empty words?

1245 Well, for the last two Budgets, 2012-13 and 2013-14, the Minister for Health announced the following would be delivered within the year, but we are still waiting: a conclusion to the negotiation of the consultants’ contract, with a new contract drawn up and signed – despite the Minister’s announcement yesterday that it was ready, we wait with baited breath; the opening of a children’s primary care clinic at St Bernard’s Hospital – or did I hear the Minister say yesterday that extra children’s clinics would now open at the Primary Care Centre, so perhaps a change of policy there; we still await a new Mental Health Act brought to Parliament.

1250 And most importantly – remember that noises about this have been made for the last five years – the medical complaints process was to be taken over by the Ombudsman’s office. We still await the necessary amendments to the Public Services Ombudsman Act, completed nearly a year ago, to come through Parliament. Hopefully, this will be presented at the end of this year, as the Ombudsman highlighted in a media interview a few days ago; but of course I must not forget – an improvement in the Minister’s eyes, no doubt – that the paid GHA Complaints Review Panel was repopulated by the Minister’s friends, many of whom are happy to publicly spout aggressive, vitriolic, anti-GSD rhetoric on Gibraltar’s social media.

1255 The Minister last year also promised that the new mental health facility would open last October – seven months ago – and then in December he said it would open this spring – last month. Perhaps they are reviewing the size of the rooms after many concerns were raised that they are smaller than prison cells. Or perhaps – we *hope*, Mr Speaker – that their manifesto commitment for providing on-site sheltered accommodation for those patients who can be cared for in the community but need home supervision and support is being explored.

1260 A stroke care protocol, a neurology service review and a management strategy for children with autism were also meant to have happened this last financial year, 2013-14. The stroke care protocol is still being developed, a neurology service is still being reviewed and certainly not enough for children with autism has been done for parents to be satisfied that the children are being offered all the support and therapies they deserve, Mr Speaker.

1265 And where is the final realisation that the present GHA board setup – exactly the same as it was since 1987, but with even less candour from board members, as they sit in public – needs a new governance system? The Hon. the Chief Minister at the last Budget said proudly how people can now turn up and listen to what is going on at the GHA board meetings. He means listen to the silence, Mr Speaker! The Chief Minister was right in implying last year that, as an ex-board member, I should have admitted his governance needed changing, and if I may quote from my 2012 Budget speech, to refresh the Hon. Member’s memories, I said:

‘As an ex-GHA Board member, I note that the GHA Board process remains exactly the same – a process I disagreed with then and one which I was hoping to change, had I been given the opportunity.

If there was one lesson that came out of the 2008 global recession... it was that board governance... was unsuccessful in setting targets and holding chief executives to account. It was found that many boards tended to be incompetent groups of competent individuals. Their expectations, if stated at all, tended to be unclear and incomplete, and the executive reports reported against few or no criteria.

This was something I felt the GHA Board was also guilty of. In the absence of clear instructions or clear assignment of the Chief Executive, we found evaluating performance was an exercise in futility. The emphasis should not be on meeting in public; it should be on empowerment of the Board. Transparency is understanding how and why spending decisions are made. It is not just the production of data, presentations from the public which will be considered and the issuing of a multitude of press releases.’

1275 Mr Speaker, this is why a GSD Government would have further empowered the GHA Board, financial managers, consultants and doctors to exercise greater control over spending choices, budgets and service prioritisation, to ensure the proper balance between medical services, value for money and budgetary discipline.

1280 With regard to the GSLP Liberal Minister's way of leading through micromanagement and political  
interference, this has not allowed for our Minister for Health to cater for a clear separation of GHA activity  
from Ministry activity. Not a day goes by when we do not hear of the Minister's open-door policy to all,  
which ends in the interference of clinical decisions, helping individuals on a personal level, even though it  
means getting their preferred private hospital of choice. And this concern is not only levelled at the Minister  
for Health: we receive even more concerns in this regard, of political interference and micromanagement by  
1285 the Ministry of Equality, Social Services and the Elderly, where every action at every level of the Ministry  
is paralysed until a final decision is taken by the Minister.

**A Member:** That is true.

1290 **Hon. Mrs I M Ellul-Hammond:** And the Members opposite thought Sir Peter Caruana was bad!  
But back to Health: an example of this political interference in clinical decisions is how, for a brief  
while over a year ago, natural procreative technology was suddenly advocated as an alternative to IVF and  
on offer privately via the GHA. The Minister hailed this in a press release as 'Government's commitment to  
healthcare goes beyond the NHS', where he showed surprise that I had questioned the validity of the GHA  
1295 to pay for and offer such non-evidence-based, non-approved by NICE... or indeed a treatment available on  
the NHS. He even called me unreasoned and lacking consideration and sensitivity.

Well, thank goodness I raised the issue; and I know that clinical opinion and lobbying from within the  
GHA soon followed, because in answers to questions last month it seems that the Minister for Health has  
finally admitted the error of this political decision and NaPro technology is not on offer via the GHA, as  
'access to this technology is currently under discussion' – the benefit of listening to your clinicians who  
1300 know, Mr Speaker, before political interference or allowing third non-clinical parties to interfere in order to  
make the best clinical decisions for the patients.

Dr Cortes did listen to clinicians with regard to changing the Primary Care Centre appointments system  
to a one-month-in-advance system. However, as the Minister also agreed yesterday, it does not seem to be  
working satisfactorily because very little else has occurred to run alongside this new policy to support it.  
1305 Every day, Mr Speaker, I have concerns raised with me about elderly citizens queuing outside the Primary  
Care Centre from 5 a.m. on the first day of the month in order to guarantee that they can get an appointment  
with their doctor; no more appointments available after 10 or 11 in the morning on the first day of the  
month, leading patients who genuinely need to review medication and control chronic conditions becoming  
lax about their own healthcare and not bothering for another whole month; the non-answering of phones to  
1310 make an appointment on the first day of the month – patients spend up to three hours ringing the Primary  
Care Centre, with no-one answering the phone because all 60 lines are busy; the multiple booking of  
appointments with a doctor in the month by a now increasing amount of people, just in case they need them,  
as they know the available appointments will run out within hours – this leads to an increase of DNAs (did  
not attend), wasted appointments, as by the time the booked appointment comes round the patient  
1315 concerned is not ill, and of course there is no cancellation list from which patients can feed into when  
DNAs or cancellations occur.

Why a patient cannot simply call at any time of the month to see their doctor, with a commitment to  
provide some form of a single medical appointment within say 72 hours, as in the UK, is unbelievable. Is  
this not the definition of a medical appointment: to see a sick person when they are in need? And patients  
1320 who are unlucky in getting their prized appointment for the month end up in Accident and Emergency,  
swamping an overstretched service under enormous pressure, with only seven doctors 24/7 and often only  
three to five nurses. Nearly 50% of patients attending A&E should be seen by a GP, of which there are 17  
in the Primary Care Centre from eight in the morning until five in the afternoon.

We understand that morale in A&E is very low: more of the GHA sickness, Mr Speaker. A&E has no  
1325 management structure for the doctors or nurses. Doctors and nurses routinely work 12-hour shifts, with  
virtually no break, and they see 30 to 40 patients on a night shift – more during the day – and from 9 p.m.  
there is only one doctor and no back-up. The risk from mistakes is significant, and I go back to one of the  
indicators: staff turnover and sickness rates are high in A&E. Patients naturally are becoming more upset  
and aggressive in A&E, with complaints daily as to waiting times as it is almost routine for a three-to-five-  
1330 hour wait in A&E daily.

The Primary Care Centre's current system is failing this community and the hospital; especially A&E is  
bearing the brunt. GPs are not given the space they need to focus on health promotion and education, which  
mitigates some attendance to GPs. The poor access to appointments and an A&E where care could be  
compromised: ultimately it is the patients who lose out.

1335 Mr Speaker, the Government has had two years to audit and get the primary care appointment system  
and the A&E service right – vital first-point-of-contact health services that reflect on the rest of the GHA. It  
is unacceptable that they have failed so dismally to deliver, so let's spend less money on sending patients to  
private hospitals and instead invest in these frontline services. But at least, Mr Speaker – in case he had



1340 failed to notice and so that he does not forget – we will have a refurbished No. 6 and we have a lovely new and green (*Banging on desks*) £5 million park! That is what matters, isn't it?

Gibraltar has about five and a half GPs per 10,000 of the population. This compares to about seven and a half per 10,000 of the population in the UK. Mr Speaker, the solution may be that we need more GPs; so some food for thought, as the Leader of the Opposition already mentioned yesterday. For the amount of £920,000 – the amount overspent by the Chief Minister on travel and entertainment this last year – we  
1345 could have employed 10 more GPs for a year and the waiting list would have reduced by 33%.

Mr Speaker, along with the mental health facility at the former Royal Naval Hospital site, we also wait with baited breath for the opening of the Alzheimer and dementia Facility later this year perhaps; a facility which, after £12.1 million on converting the site, was nearly ready to open when this Government took the project over. For 16 months, the site ceased any activity, and now, after another £17.5 million to convert the  
1350 conversion, the two facilities are ready and we must be awaiting, until later this year, the completion of the dementia day care centre – which is not a new concept, by the way, with more funding needed for that before the site is opened: £30 million and counting for whimsical changes and avoidable delays, Mr Speaker, *y no había dinero!* (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)

Notwithstanding the reckless devil-may-care spending spree of this Government, there is still no provision in the estimates for extra staffing to man the site, despite the training. Dates for these new facilities – first 18 months ago, then a year ago, then six months ago – were all expected opening dates. When will these two facilities finally open, Mr Speaker, and at what final cost? The Estimates Book includes no funding for the running and manning of the new facilities. Does this mean we may need to wait  
1355 another year before the facilities fully open? Can the Government bear to add to the already extra almost 600 public sector workers who have been employed since they came into power? Or does the Government need to reign in overspending, as the Care Agency has also overspent its budget this last financial year by £3.7 million: by 17%.

Perhaps, Mr Speaker, the knowledge that the moment these facilities are filled one of the acute wards at St Bernard's Hospital will again fill with elderly long-stay patients awaiting a care bed – as Sir Peter Caruana predicted many a time when the then shadow Health Minister, Neil Costa, complained about the beds situation – is this what is stopping the Government from opening the facilities? Or maybe there is no more money to employ extra staff to run these facilities. We wait patiently. There certainly seems to be money to build a £24 million small boats marina, Mr Speaker! (*Laughter*)  
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Another site that was ready for use when this Government came into power was the former John Mackintosh Wing Home. It has taken two and a half years, another reconversion and another £4 million to finally release the property for social use. Mr Speaker, forward planning and vision are not strengths of this Government; more like 'making it up as we go along'.  
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At the past Budget session, Mr Speaker, the Minister for Social Services said that under her watch, through constant reviews and working closely with management, the Care Agency is much less of a beast when she inherited it. From where we are, it seems that this beast is still alive and kicking, because as with the GHA, there are certain indicators which demonstrate the low morale and unhappiness within the agency. Sickness rates, turnover of staff and recruitment and retention of staff all point to this. Like other GHA staff, sickness rates among elderly care nurses this last year was higher than for 2012. They missed an average of eight days each a year, and that is not taking into account short-term sick leave or uncertified  
1375 leave. When compared to the human resources gold standard of 4.4 days, there are twice as many elderly care nurses off sick than there really should be.

Another indicator is the high turnover of staff at the Care Agency and Social Services Department, which over two and a half years has seen 64 people resigning under this Government's watch in what is now the tamed 'beast'. In comparison, 69 GHA staff resigned in that period, in an Authority with a third extra staff employed there than in the Care Agency. In the Care Agency, the loss of, on average since this administration took office, a constant two members of staff a month... These include 44 care workers – 15 who worked with the elderly and 29 within other areas of the Care Agency. (**A Member:** Terrible! Terrible!) Six social workers have also resigned from their position. This demonstrates a high level of dissatisfaction and low morale at the Care Agency, (*Banging on desks*) especially when the Children and Families team has been under immense pressure to cover caseloads and effectively undertake the full range of essential tasks necessary for the well-being of our most vulnerable. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.)  
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The persistent loss of staff has also required a high number of supply care workers from private sector providers, filling in the gaps in order to provide cover and a service to our most vulnerable. Even these private carers are not lasting long in working for the Care Agency. Difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff in the Care Agency also extends to these private care providers. The result is that many vulnerable people have been deprived of the benefit of a close working relationship with the workers they relied and depended upon. Stability, continuity of care, familiarity and security with a regular group of carers is constantly under threat. For the Minister to have argued that staff turnover was as high during the GSD's  
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1400 time in office is nonsensical, because nothing has changed and this flies in the face of the taming of the beast that was the Care Agency.

1405 Last Budget, Mr Speaker, the Minister proclaimed that the Children and Families team was developing an adoption and fostering policy and that they were undertaking a review of the Adoption Act. Despite a commitment to such a review, in two and a half years there have only been seven adoptions and seven foster placements. Most worryingly, the seven foster placements took place in the first six months of this Government's term of office. There has not been even one foster placement in the last two years. 'Worrying' because there are many families in Gibraltar willing to provide a safe and stable environment for children and young people during a difficult time in their lives and who, for whatever reason, cannot be looked after in their own home. Such a vital service as this, which the Care Agency should be committed to in terms of training and supporting adults as potential foster carers, has not been happening and it means we are denying our most vulnerable children the breathing space to get away from a very difficult life. The Children and Families team has been so overstretched and under pressure that they did not have the time or the will to offer this vital service. We now hope that the extra social workers will pick up on the slack, and we look forward to learn more of any new measures with regard to fostering.

1415 Again, as announced at the last Budget, Mr Speaker, there is still no news on legislation to vet those who work with children in the voluntary sector. There is no news on the Challenging Behaviour Unit, or funding provision for it in the Estimates Book. It is good that our elderly are being provided with new facilities and options for domiciliary care and residential services, but it should not be at the expense of those vulnerable children who cannot defend themselves and who must rely on the state to make the proper and full provisions at their disposal and on their behalf.

1420 Another vulnerable sector of our community – the disabled – are still waiting for the Government to 'urgently honour', as their charity representatives described it, their manifesto commitment which said that in their first year they would legislate to further protect disabled people using the terms of the UN Convention as a model. The Minister has recommitted to this today. Let's see how it is enacted later this year as announced.

1425 Despite physical improvements in Gibraltar for those with disabilities, there is a way to go. Representations to us from those charities and those with mobility issues claim they are unhappy with the access from ramps on the beach to get to the seashore. They are unhappy that the disability stands at the Cavalcade and National Day do not cater for the families of those disabled to join them; and unhappy that there still is no appropriate, audited supported employment which actively and appropriately transitions those with special needs from education to employment and adult life, such as Project Search, a pioneering model that the Disability Society advocates.

1430 However, with this Government's poor track record on focused and accredited training, audited apprenticeship schemes and the Future Job Strategy – which my hon. Friend, Mr Bossino, will have some more to say on during his intervention, Mr Speaker – I am not surprised that the Sheltered Employment Scheme also leaves much to be desired. (**Two Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desk*) One thing is throwing in the odd training day here, holding a conference day there and raising awareness by handing out leaflets, Mr Speaker; the other is actively working together with the groups and people who know what the real issues are, in order to design the services and provisions that really matter and that can make a difference in the lives of those with disabilities.

1440 Again, Mr Speaker, the Minister for Equality announced the setting up of a Domestic Violence Forum last year, which she says does not yet exist, despite the Minister stating it did so in answer to Parliament Questions. This forum was to make recommendations and act on initiatives that would come from them in order to tackle this scourge. I now look forward to any initiatives coming from the now set up forum which will be set up, because last year 55 incidents of domestic violence were reported to the Police, and in the first five months of 2014 there were already 84 cases reported against persons ranging from the age of 13 up to 76. About half of the cases will be legally pursued, Mr Speaker, ending up possibly in persons charged, but more frightening is that these are only the number of *reported* incidents. The dark figure of unreported crime can be anything from three to five times that figure, especially with domestic violence. It is to all these voiceless and frightened victims that we have a responsibility to react and to make a difference, and as the Minister said in a press release last year, 'to ensure that such violence is entirely eliminated in Gibraltar'; which is why I welcome the psychological support for victims and any new preventative measures that we put in place.

1450 In that same press release for the International Day of Eliminating Violence against Women, the Minister for Equality also said that:

1455 'This is not a partisan issue and I trust that we will be able to count on the support of the Opposition for our work on this front.'

Well, they do have our support, Mr Speaker, and we would like to hear of the work that is being done in this area and to contribute where we can.

1460 But not one policy in relation to women's equality issues has come from the Minister for Equality. The Equal Opportunities Commission is still three words on a manifesto page, despite a commitment today that it will be created sometime this year. The ideas, pilot projects and reforms remain elusive, despite press releases of the Minister attending a Women's Conference here, another somewhere else in the world, and another one somewhere else. The ideas are not brought back to Gibraltar yet. They remain abroad in those elusive conferences among those hallowed groups.

1465 Interestingly, while the Minister participated in the British Islands and Mediterranean Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians' Inaugural Conference, her contribution was linked to the participation by women in politics to push for increased representation. She highlighted the critical role that current women parliamentarians can play in inspiring other women to enter politics. Let us hope that this is the case. If not, the Minister's words on Women's International Day:

1470 'My aim is to mobilise meaningful change where this is necessary in order to achieve gender equality'

are not just empty words. So we look forward to the conference early next year and to see what comes out of it.

1475 Mr Speaker, on 9th December 2011, Gibraltar experienced a new dawn. Dawn gave way to a cloudy day and the sun has scarcely shone in this community since. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) Hanging above this community is a dark cloud of fear, control and secrecy, which engulfs Gibraltar as the GSLP Liberals' way beds once more into our society. Their answer to everything, as they figure out what they are doing, is to spend, spend, spend, and of course to blame the GSD. (**A Member:** Exactly!) The 'GSD could have done it in the last 16 years' argument no longer washes with the electorate. So much had to be done and was achieved by the GSD to pull Gibraltar up after 1996; and of course more remains to be done. But financial government is now the responsibility of *this* Government. They are spending money with reckless abandon, 1480 having inherited the GSD's golden legacy, Mr Speaker. What they do not seem to realise is that Gibraltar's public finances are not a bottomless pit. (**A Member:** Exactly.) What money we have we have because we still, as a community, have the resources available for the Government to spend. But one thing is clear: out-of-control spending must not be allowed to continue unabated.

1485 As my hon. Friend, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has stated time and again, including yesterday, the channelling of public money by Government through a private company, which is free to invest in whatever ill-advised project it decides and then use its private commercial status to hide its activities from public scrutiny, is scandalous and an aberration of the very concept of democracy and public transparency. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) This goes against all that European Governments – in particular, that of David Cameron – are successfully fighting to stop. This is a very worrying pillar stone of the Government's general *modus operandi* and more akin to the Governments of so-called banana republics than a community member of the European Union. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) Even more seriously, it is a contemptuous affront and disrespectful to the people of Gibraltar. (**A Member:** Absolutely.)

1490 However, thankfully for Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, the sun has now begun to set on this Government's term of office, and as dusk approaches the winds of opportunity are starting to blow. The winds of change, like a fresh westerly after a spell of muggy levanter on a sunny August morning, will soon rid Gibraltar of the transient visionless and hopefully short-lived 'leadership' of this community by the GSLP Liberals and usher in the dawn of a new GSD Government when the Chief Minister calls the next election. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks and applause*)

1500 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, given the presence of the Minister for Europe in Gibraltar, I now need to recess the House until 2.30, and invite Members to return then. They can, in the interim, go outside where the sun, the last time I checked, was shining very brightly indeed and there was a very fresh *poniente* wind.

1505 **Mr Speaker:** The House will recess to this afternoon at 2.30, when I think the Hon. Mr Gilbert Licudi will take the floor.

*The House recessed at 11.40 a.m. and resumed its sitting at 2.03 p.m.*