



# PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

**MORNING SESSION: 9.39 a.m. – 12.57 p.m.**

**Gibraltar, Thursday, 7th July 2016**

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# The Gibraltar Parliament

*The Parliament met at 9.39 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 2016 – For Second Reading – Debate continued**

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

5 **Minister for Tourism, Housing, Equality and Social Services (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, another term, after our resounding election success and the public vote of confidence, and with the challenges that lie ahead for us. But we are a strong team, Mr Speaker, and together we will work as hard as we need to, to serve and to deliver.

10 Mr Speaker, as you know, I have an extremely broad portfolio. It would be impossible for me to list all the achievements this past financial year. I will highlight the most notable matters, and that is not to say that anything that I may not specifically mention is any less important.

Mr Speaker, I will commence my intervention outlining achievements in my tourism portfolio.

15 Now, more than ever, the development of our tourism industry is essential. Since the Referendum, we have had a very busy week indeed reassuring our industry partners that it is business as usual in Gibraltar. Our administration has already presided over a tourist boom in Gibraltar in recent years; we have seen growth in an industry that had been greatly boosted as a result of our efforts. Our vision from the outset was to prioritise tourism as a key sector for the sustained development of our local economy and we have demonstrated our political commitment to tourism growth.

20 We believed that the tourism sector in Gibraltar suffered from underinvestment, was underdeveloped and as such it was not the economic driver that it ought to be. My predecessor, Minister Costa, quickly set about to change that in the start of our first term of office. Our Government has invested in the massive, untapped potential and taken Gibraltar to new and impressive heights. In our second term I will continue with the same vision and determination and vigour as I did in the last. We have invested heavily in what we have no doubt is a unique tourist product. We have worked closely with our tourism partners and stakeholders in our community and internationally and we have transformed ourselves.

25 The Upper Rock is a unique feature we have to offer and is certainly recognised as the jewel in our crown. The Tourist Board's unprecedented investment in its sites in the Upper Rock and the transformation of the Nature Reserve, led by the Department of the Environment and Climate Change and, of course, my colleague, Minister Cortes, has been a game changer in upgrading our product. The restoration of the themed country trails and footpaths and the addition of some innovative attractions, the most impressive is certainly the Windsor suspension

35 bridge at Royal Anglian Way; it is breath-taking and a tremendous engineering feat, which we  
opened just a few weeks ago. And we will shortly be adding a further attraction when we open  
the glass sky walk viewing platform which is perched near the Rock's summit. It will provide  
striking panoramic vistas of the majestic geography surrounding Gibraltar, and I look forward to  
the inauguration of that too, Mr Speaker.

40 The Northern Defences is another important new addition, and we heard the Deputy Chief  
Minister describe to us on Tuesday, this beautiful place of great military significance and  
heritage value, but which for decades was merely a dumping ground for anything that could be  
thrown over a wall. Wonderful additions to our visitor attractions which, of course, my Tourist  
Board is already busy marketing. Symbolically, they are enduring symbols of our Government's  
commitment to improve Gibraltar.

45 Our plan for growth has been strategic, and has been focused primarily on niche markets,  
such as the weddings and the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, Exhibitions, (MICE) markets.  
One of the most successful niche markets is our events-led tourism strategy. We have become  
adept at organising first class cultural events that are thoroughly enjoyed by everyone here and  
which act as a magnet for visitors. On the back of these intense and high profile occasions, the  
50 Gibraltar leisure and hospitality industry has been able to take advantage of the interest  
generated by the tourists we attract.

It has become an important tool in our revitalised tourism strategy and these instruments  
help us promote Gibraltar. I work very closely with my friend, Minister Linares, and the Tourist  
Board works closely, in turn, with the Ministry for Culture, which takes the lead in organising  
55 these fantastic events which the Tourist Board markets.

The Tourist Board is responsible for organising the Gibunco Gibraltar Literary Festival. While  
the quality and high standard appears effortless to everyone attending, this is no mean feat to  
organise, Mr Speaker. The festival has become one of our flagship events, and will enjoy its  
fourth edition this autumn. It has become firmly established and its popularity continues to  
60 increase, as does its status. Testament to its prestige in such a short period of time is that we  
have been fortunate and are thrilled and honoured that earlier this year Her Royal Highness, the  
Princess Royal, agreed to be patron of the festival. This status, of course, also provides us with  
fantastic international exposure which attracts high level participants and visitors.

Our festival attracts a constellation of authors, poets and renowned speakers, we have  
65 already announced over 20 speakers who will be participating in this year's festival and we are  
already engaged in intense marketing of the event in Spain and the UK. As part of our vigorous  
marketing campaign of this event it is interesting to note that last year the festival achieved a  
radio audience of two million in the UK, commercial radio outlets and seven BBC radio channels  
between Scotland and the Channel Islands featured the festival and included extended  
70 interviews with a couple of the main speakers.

Mr Speaker, I wish to thank our principal sponsor, Gibunco and all sponsors who by doing so  
make the event viable and contribute to enriching our culture through it.

Also, we have upgraded and rebranded our marketing strategy and this is also contributing to  
our success. We have an excellent tourist product, Mr Speaker and we want to show it off and  
75 we are continually looking for more efficient and effective ways of marketing ourselves.

We actively participate in various fora and are continuously looking to establish new  
partnerships such as the ITT conference that I attended in Tel Aviv last month. We will be  
hosting the Med Cruise conference next year, another wonderful platform for promotion.

80 Mr Speaker I am delighted to report that we have already seen return on our investments  
and growth in the sector. Our figures are up year-on-year so clearly the improvements that I  
have outlined have had a positive effect on our visitor numbers. I am pleased to say that the last  
published statistics show that arrivals at hotels have increased; in fact we have the highest  
numbers since 2007.

85 We are achieving our objective, Mr Speaker, and our transformed tourist product is  
translating into growth. The most notable growth since we were elected has been seen in

aviation. This sector continues to report very healthy findings, in all categories, catering for the needs of both the business and the leisure traveller. Inbound and outgoing air passengers on established routes have increased in the past 12 months. Today we have more flights to the UK than ever before. Just last Sunday we saw the arrival of the inaugural easyJet flight from Manchester. Indeed, Mr Speaker, when I was at the Airport last Sunday, I was delighted to see the departure lounge busier than I have ever seen it.

The additional flights and new routes we have secured are: Monarch's Birmingham flight, the new easyJet routes to Bristol and Manchester along with Royal Air Maroc's service to Tangier and Casablanca. These have generated extra passengers. In specific terms, Mr Speaker, this summer alone we have seen a 40.8% growth in capacity and a weekly flights increase of 31.5% compared to last year, which in itself was a record year. (A Member: Hear, hear.)

Among other highlights of this past year has been easyJet's achievement in attending the tremendous milestone last August of carrying a million passengers on the Gibraltar-London Gatwick route – and we look forward to welcoming another million, Mr Speaker!

The Gibraltar-Bristol link carried 35,000 passengers in its first year and is proving extremely successful. I am also delighted to report that easyJet is set to provide extra seat capacity between Gibraltar and London Gatwick by 15% this summer season with an additional 13,000 places being made available since March this year. Overall this airline will operate 18 weekly flights to Gibraltar this summer season, up from 14 last summer. We are extremely pleased about the close working relationship that we have established with easyJet of late, which has enabled us to establish new routes. Given the commitment to Gibraltar we continue to work closely with them on further growth and look forward to being able to introduce new routes in due course.

Additional capacity has also been provided by another long standing partner of ours, British Airways, with two extra weekly flights the London Heathrow-Gibraltar, flights which commenced on the 1st May this year, bringing the total number of flights on this route to 13 a week. Monarch also launched their London Gatwick-Gibraltar route in May this year, offering four flights a week, and this is the airline's fourth UK destination from Gibraltar.

In summary, Mr Speaker, over the summer months, Gibraltar will offer: 17 weekly flights from London Gatwick – up from 11 last year, 13 weekly flights from London Heathrow – up from nine, five weekly flights from London Luton, six weekly flights from Manchester – up from four, four weekly flights from Birmingham – up from three, three weekly flights from Bristol, two weekly flights to Casablanca and Tangier. This represents no less than 50 flights a week – up from 37 in the summer of 2015. Mr Speaker, you will be pleased to know that we recorded our busiest summer in 2015 and in the period July to August we recorded over 45,000 passengers each month. This represents an increase of 12.7% against July 2014, and 10% above the August figures, importantly, visitor arrivals by air increased by 7.1 % in 2015 over 2014.

Mr Speaker, we have recorded an increase of 22% in passenger growth in the first five months of 2016 compared to the same period in 2015. May was already a record month with 49,583 passengers processed, beating even the record number from last August. With the main summer holiday period still to take place, further records are expected to be registered in the next few months.

Mr Speaker, I wish to emphasise at this juncture that the substantial increase in airline activity has come as a result, principally, due to our ability to generate demand for Gibraltar bound seats, and on a broader scale, on our political foresight in making tourism a priority and our success in developing and massively upgrading our local tourist product. It is *not*, as the opposition would have you believe, due to the new airport terminal on which they grossly overspent – I take it they agree, Mr Speaker, because they are nodding.

Gibraltar is one of the most diverse ports in the Mediterranean. Any objective observer closely following the development of Gibraltar's cruise industry in recent years would agree that the Rock is experiencing a golden age of cruising. In 2015 we ranked third in terms of countries that experienced an increase in the number of cruise port calls with a growth of 12.7%.

Our extraordinary accomplishment on this front is backed by hard evidence, as the number of cruise calls, cruise inaugurals and passenger visits continue to grow year after year. We really do have something to offer for all types of customers and visitors in Gibraltar. In 2015 we had 13 cruise inaugurals, 204 cruise visits and 295,922 passenger visits. In 2016 Gibraltar Port is scheduled to receive 225 cruise calls, a 10.3% increase on last year, carrying an estimated 344,415 passengers to the Rock, and no less than a record of 18 inaugural cruise calls.

Arrivals by sea have this year increased by 14.2%, and that includes yacht arrivals that have increased by 8%. The robust upward trend reflects the healthy state of the industry and consolidates the growth registered in 2015, which was in turn a sizeable improvement on 2014's 180 cruise calls.

A notable development in 2016 is that Noble Caledonia has chosen Gibraltar as a turnaround port. This represents a major breakthrough, and there will be two turnarounds this year, one in October and another in November. It must be noted that growth also demonstrates that we can successfully handle some of the largest vessels ever built, including the Royal Caribbean's Ovation of the Seas. The progress demonstrates the confidence that the industry has in Gibraltar and we look forward to continuing our business partnerships with some of the most prestigious cruise lines in the world.

Mr Speaker, in 2015 visitor numbers to the Upper Rock registered an 8% increase in respect of 2014, reaching the record breaking figure of 858,508. To end May 2016, visitor numbers to the Upper Rock have increased by 13.64% over last year. April, this year, is the only month to have shown a decrease. This we attribute to Easter falling at the end of March, which showed a significant increase on the same month the previous year.

Mr Speaker, it is clear that – whether it be arrivals by land, increased air travellers or cruise line passengers – it can be said that the international leisure industry firmly has Gibraltar in its sights. Gibraltar has strengthened its position in the global market as a leading short break destination and port of call in the western Mediterranean. Mr Speaker, we will continue our determination that this sector grows as an economic driver and, of course, we are committed to work tirelessly on this front with our partners and stakeholders to stimulate further growth and expansion. We are determined to ensure that the positive outcomes experienced in the past 12 months continue unabated. We will continue to diversify and, of course, without a shadow of a doubt, the message is clear insofar as tourism, as with every other part of our strong and successful economy – Gibraltar remains open for business.

Turning to housing, Mr Speaker, I am proud to say that this past year has indeed been a landmark year on a number of fronts.

In my speech last year, I referred to the affordable housing schemes that we were constructing and this year those have become a reality. Earlier in the year, we saw the completion of two magnificent affordable housing projects at Beach View Terraces and at Mons Calpe Mews. The homes are spacious and the standard of construction is indeed very high. Many families have already moved in and I receive frequent reports of how happy people are with their new homes: Exciting times for many, Mr Speaker.

The ingenious idea of constructing for co-ownership, thereby making it affordable and as such so successful, and enabling people to get on the property ladder, was developed by the GSLP when we were first in office, and we will continue so as to ensure that the acute demand for housing that we saw snowball in the last 20 years are not repeated.

The construction of a further at least 1,500 flats in the next phase of construction of affordable housing at Hassan Centenary Terraces and Bob Peliza Mews has already shown incredible interest, this, Mr Speaker, demonstrates that there is an overwhelming desire to own property.

Furthermore, I am just as proud to be part of a government that will deliver purpose built flats for the elderly, 142 to be precise. The concept of building flats for the elderly is a great one; such flats are in high demand. We have taken it to the next level in the new developments at Charles Bruzon House and Sea Master Lodge, by consulting with every single relevant

190 professional who have been collaborating in the planning and design to achieve the best design  
of these flats, and learning from the mistakes of the existing accommodation for the elderly.  
These flats incorporate the latest accessibility features, spacious showers, colour contrast for the  
benefit of the visually impaired, non-slip tiles and individual panic buttons. The design of the  
building takes account of wheelchair users; includes ramps, automatic doors and lifts.

195 Regrettably, Mr Speaker, you will recall that we had to go to considerable expense in  
alterations to remedy defects preventing accessibility in Albert Risso and Bishop Canilla Homes,  
as well as converting baths to showers so as to make those flats more comfortable for the  
elderly tenants. Our purpose built flats will make an incredible improvement to the quality of life  
of our elderly community and will help them remain at home with dignity, comfortably, safely  
200 and independently for longer.

In turn, a considerable number of larger accommodations will be returned to the  
Government's rental housing stock. The first of those, Mr Speaker, Sea Master Lodge at Mons  
Calpe Mews estate, has just now been handed over to the Government, and we shall embark on  
the process of allocation to applicants very shortly. So in no time at all, Mr Speaker, those  
205 individuals who have applied for these flats will be hearing from us.

All in all, the first phase of construction of flats by our Government have given the people of  
Gibraltar in excess of 1,000 new homes, needless to say that this will in turn have a considerable  
impact on the housing waiting lists. In addition, there will also be flats returned to the rental  
stock by individuals who have purchased or who may be moving into the flats for the elderly.

210 In addition to the new construction, we continue with our extensive refurbishment  
programme of existing government rental housing estates, which as we heard on Tuesday, the  
enhancement has converted these into assets by way of investment.

The major refurbishment works at Glacis and Moorish Castle estates are virtually complete,  
and have undeniably contributed to visually transforming what was previously dreary and  
215 neglected architecture at Gibraltar's land entry point.

Phases I and II at Laguna Estate are practically complete and phase III is already being staged  
in. Again, the improvement to this estate is plainly visible.

Refurbishment works to Alameda Estate also continue, and the blocks remaining will be  
completed in this term of office.

220 An extensive refurbishment programme is also underway at New Police Barracks at Willis'  
Road.

The general embellishment, road resurfacing and parking rationalisation works to Varyl Begg  
Estate is now complete.

225 Mr Speaker, refurbishment works to other major estates will also continue. We are  
committed to an ongoing programme of maintenance and improvement of our rental housing  
stock. We have invested, and we will continue to invest, in the maintenance and upkeep of our  
estates for the benefit of the families who live in them.

230 Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister announced on Tuesday that housing rent will be increased for  
the first time since 1984. Mr Speaker, you will be aware that the Ombudsman, in his report,  
called for the need to review housing rents. Since the announcement by the Chief Minister, this  
step has been widely accepted and indeed welcomed, perhaps more on a matter of principle  
than the value of income that it will generate. After all, Mr Speaker, the increase is relatively  
minimal and modest by all accounts.

235 I will take the liberty of reminding the House of the statistics that the Chief Minister provided  
on Tuesday: average earnings in 1984 were £126 per week. Average earnings in 2015 were £555  
a week. That is a rise of 340.5%. Inflation in that time has risen by 153.5%, therefore the  
increase in rent, 3%, is therefore considerably lower than if it had been increased in line with  
inflation.

240 I will continue to look at the figures and provide an income statistics versus affordability  
comparison – In 1984 rent at £18.70 was 14.8% and at income rates in 2015, the cost of the  
same rent, because of course it never changed, was 3.4%. On this basis, if the same proportion

of income was expended on rent, the rents in 2015 should now be £82.14 per flat per week and if rents from 1984 had been adjusted for actual inflation in 2015 they would have risen to a level of £47.40 per flat per week. Mr Speaker, it is all relative too, as £100 in April 1984 is the equivalent of £253.36 today.

So all in all, Mr Speaker, a very modest increase indeed, on average will translate to an increase of 60 pence a month. And the increase in rent, Mr Speaker, of 3% will take effect as from the 1st September this year, and tenants will be notified accordingly.

As an aside, Mr Speaker, but important, tenants paying rent by direct debit, standing order or other methods of deduction must remember to make arrangements for the payment of the new rent once due and to adjust their payment mandate, otherwise Mr Speaker, heaven forbid, we would not want anyone to inadvertently fall into arrears on the increase, otherwise an average of 60p will be accrued accidentally each month. In any event, of course, the Housing Department will be checking this and assisting people.

On the subject of arrears, Mr Speaker, perhaps the most notable achievement in the Housing Department this financial year has finally seen the implementation of procedures to recover arrears of housing rent, a long standing problem that has been festering for far too long.

Before I go any further, Mr Speaker, I wish to make one thing very clear at the outset, we are certain that there must be a distinction between those who cannot pay rent and those who do not wish to pay rent, without any reason for not doing so. (*Banging on desks*) Thank you, because firm action has never been taken in the past, it has unfortunately become the norm for the latter not to pay rent. The Department is sympathetic to individuals who genuinely are unable to, or have difficulty to meet their monthly rental instalments, and officials try to be as helpful as possible. Unfortunately, there will always be people who are genuinely unable to pay rent, and in these circumstances it is our duty as a community to assist. They are not the priority in our strategy for recovery of arears.

Now, Mr Speaker, I sincerely hope that the Principal Auditor is listening because I think that he will be very pleased with what I am about to explain. He will also now have to change the template that he has been using in the auditor's report in respect of the Housing Department for the past, I would say, 15 years. Mr Speaker, I am proud to announce that the problem with the accrual of rent arrears and failing to collect these is no longer.

Upon my appointment as Minister for Housing, just over a year and a half ago, I made it my first priority to tackle this issue that had for a long time spiralled out of control and as such, suffered from the ostrich syndrome. I make the point at this stage that this is in no way a criticism of my predecessors, my friends, the late Charles Bruzon, and Minister Paul Balban. Indeed, I have been fortunate to benefit from their hard work as they had already set about dealing with the other housing priorities which were, of course, to lay the foundations for the construction of additional housing and plan the major refurbishment works, the results and benefits of which we have already seen.

Mr Speaker, it is absolutely unconscionable that we find ourselves in this situation in relation to rent arrears. For too long, far too many people have considered the payment of rent as optional, or have seen it as an interest free loan which they would never be required to repay. They have been allowed to think this and get away with it, as there has been no action taken or even an attempt to recover and no consequences for failure to pay. The collection of arrears, Mr Speaker, is about people understanding their duties. Paying rent is about taking social and moral responsibility and therefore if this is not done, it is right and just that we pursue this debt. Not just because we are contractually entitled to, but it is right that we do so because we have a duty to all other tenants who pay their rent dutifully and on time and to all who meet their mortgage repayments and to those taxpayers who are otherwise having to subsidise those who choose not to pay rent.

Mr Speaker, it took me the better part of a year to organise the Housing Department's databases and IT systems so that we could have clear information to formulate a good recovery strategy and then work on the strategy itself so as to have a clear picture on our plan of action in

295 the most efficient and effective way. We were finally able to embark on the recovery strategy  
and implement it in earnest in January this year, with a new team within the Housing  
Department dedicated, almost exclusively, to the recovery of rent arrears, so the majority of the  
figures that I am about to report are from the progress from that date. Next year, Mr Speaker, I  
will be able to more properly report back for the full financial year. More or less at the same  
time as we started collecting arrears, the Government's Central Arrears Unit was formed and we  
300 have also called upon them from time to time for assistance.

We have a fluid strategy, Mr Speaker, and I meet with the dedicated arrears team almost  
weekly, to ensure that we consolidate the process and keep the momentum going. Every week  
we review the position and brainstorm as to how we can improve the process further. Given the  
large number of debtors, we have broken them down into bands depending on the size of the  
305 debt and have varying strategies for the recovery of each band. The priority has been to recover  
from the top 25 debtors and everyone who owed under £1,000, as we wanted to deal with this  
while the debt was still manageable for them.

In most cases we ask tenants to repay a lump sum and then enter into a repayment  
agreement for the balance. Importantly, Mr Speaker, in all cases of arrears, where agreements  
310 have been signed, repayment is secured by direct debit, standing order or deduction at source in  
the case of public servants. We have updated our systems and databases and updated a  
software system for rent collection, we have introduced a new monthly billing format which  
highlights the arrears, we have also introduced a revised rent arrears agreement. We have  
embarked on an awareness campaign and introduced a facility to make lump sum payments on  
315 line via the new e-gov portal of up to £2,500, so that people do not have to physically attend the  
Department to effect payment of arrears. No exchanges, inclusions or exclusions on the tenancy  
are allowed for people who are in arrears.

No parking spaces will be provided or renewed in cases where people are in arrears. And I  
will use Mid Harbours estate as an example, Mr Speaker, only because parking permits in that  
320 estate expired on the 30th June this year. For a number of months now we have been writing to  
tenants on a number of occasions, reminding them of the requirement that arrears be paid in  
full in order for the parking permit to be renewed. A fob is required to activate the barrier to the  
car park at that estate for those who are authorised to park. Those in arrears have been clearly  
advised, for a while now, that they would no longer be authorised to park beyond the 1st July.  
325 On 4th July we deactivated the barrier fobs to all those in arrears. And, Mr Speaker, on the basis  
of our strategy to collect rent on arrears in relation to this estate, which historically has suffered  
from big arrears problems, the total figure in arrears of which just exceeds half a million pounds  
we have collected in this period £90,411, and that is just in a few months, Mr Speaker. Thirty  
nine tenants from Mid Harbours have settled their arrears in full, amounting to £84,085, and  
330 these are figures that I have as from yesterday.

So, Mr Speaker, that is just by way of example to show that the strategy is working. These  
figures say more about the willingness to pay rent than the ability to pay rent because these 39  
individuals have all paid what they owed in a lump sum. So, Mr Speaker, the situation at Mid  
Harbours is well on its way to being improved.

335 Similarly, Mr Speaker, we have applied the same strategy and not allocated any sheds or  
berths in the new small boats marina in cases of arrears – of those offered berths at the new  
marina, 32 people were in arrears, of those 26 people have paid in full and in this way we have  
recovered £42,747.94 (**A Member:** Well done.) (*Banging on desks*) in a short period of time. And  
11 debtors have actually foregone the opportunity of a new berth because they have not been  
340 willing to pay arrears.

Requests for non-essential works are not accepted by the Department for people in arrears.  
And importantly, Mr Speaker, as from 1st September it will be compulsory for all rent and  
arrears to be deducted at source for all public servants, unless payment is already being made by  
direct debit or standing order without default. It is totally unacceptable that people who are in



345 employment should be indebted to their employer, this should never have been allowed and for  
years no one has implemented any mechanism to prevent it. We now have, Mr Speaker.

Since January to date, in addition to issuing bills in the new format, which highlights that the  
tenancy is in arrears, the Housing Department has issued a total of 2,599 letters to debtors. This  
figure includes up to three or four letters in some cases. And in the same period, Mr Speaker,  
350 this year since January, the Department has arranged 414 appointments with debtors, of which  
313 have attended. Officers meet with tenants individually and try to establish the reason for  
the non-payment and offer assistance with a repayment plan. Meetings are amiable. Officials  
consider the individual circumstances and try to assist genuine cases of hardship as much as  
possible. Close liaison with the Department of Social Security quickly verifies whether rent relief  
355 may be offered. And in cases of unemployment we have also established a seamless referral  
system to the Employment Service, which luckily just happens to be next door to the Housing  
Department. At the moment we have two teams of officers who see people daily. There are, Mr  
Speaker, a further 687 meetings scheduled. So as you can see a very live process and people are  
engaging well. So far, Mr Speaker, 196 repayment agreements have been signed since January  
360 this year.

This has secured arrears in the sum of £766,447.99 – payment is mostly secured by deduction  
at source and standing order. Essentially so far we have secured the sum of £21,569.77 a month  
in respect of arrears via repayment agreements. In addition, and I would say more importantly,  
we have secured the payment of monthly rent going forward in the sum of £16,012.14, every  
365 month. Of course, that number will continue to increase as the team continues to see people.  
We have introduced a mechanism in the software that immediately advises us upon a default in  
repayment of the arrears agreement and a letter is issued immediately. The Department is now  
working closely with a number of other Government Departments to update information on  
tenants. Working together to safeguard arrears by public sector workers and other mechanisms  
370 will be introduced for those who work in the private sector. But first and foremost, Mr Speaker,  
while the figures that I have quoted are important, the most important thing is that there is a  
clear strategy on arrears collection which is being pursued by the Housing Department and is  
constantly under review with a view to improving.

This debt has been allowed to accumulate over a period of 20 years. It is still early days in our  
375 strategy, but it is clearly working in a very short period of time. The strategy, Mr Speaker, is  
twofold. Of course we aim to recover the existing debt, but even more importantly, we want to  
stop it from escalating further and by introducing the new mechanisms we are securing the  
monthly rent going forward. That is, not only have we reduced the figure of the debt, had we  
not implemented the new system it would have continued to grow beyond £6 million.

380 Mr Speaker, I am delighted to report, that since the answer to the last Parliament Question  
on the balance of arrears, i.e. people who owe in excess of three months' rent as at the 31st  
May, the balance of arrears as at 30th June has again reduced to £5,425,830.21. Mr Speaker, the  
debt accrued is not something that can easily be resolved overnight; after all it has taken 20  
years for it to reach where it is.

385 It must be recalled, Mr Speaker, that when the GSLP left office in 1996, arrears were  
£655,031 and it was under the GSD's watch that rent arrears passed the one million mark and  
increased steadily and by about 600% by the time they left office, leaving behind a debt of  
almost £4m by 2011. While it is a matter of fact that the debt continued to grow on the same  
trend while we were unable to change the system at the outset, we are now addressing the  
390 matter and I am relieved that the balance of arrears is, for the first time, in steady decline.

An important factor, Mr Speaker – and I am sure that those opposite, in particular Mr Clinton,  
will be glad to hear – this strategy has been implemented without any additional human  
resources expense. We have done this by restructuring the Department and redeploying people  
internally, so no additional personnel have been employed, and there has been no need and  
395 therefore no expense incurred in overtime.

Mr Speaker, it is still early days, but the important point to note is that there is a plan of action. The plan is in place and it is working. The most valuable achievement is ensuring that going forward tenants do not continue to default in their arrears, and I am confident, Mr Speaker, that my report at the end of this financial year will show significant improvement, and I  
400 look forward to reporting back to this Parliament a year from now.

Mr Speaker, at this stage I must publicly recognise the commitment and hard work of the arrears recovery team at the Housing Department for their absolute dedication to the process. Previously, unfortunately, they had no mandate to do this despite them wanting to embark on the recovery of arrears, as the diligent public servants that they are. This year they have  
405 vigorously pursued the arrears recovery strategy, have seen hundreds of people – and not all meetings are pleasant, Mr Speaker, as you can imagine – they have processed hundreds of payments accurately, and on time, and all with a turnover, vigour and efficiency that you would have thought that they were being paid on commission on the amount recovered, which incidentally they are not, Mr Speaker.

On a final note on housing and a reference to the Ombudsman's report; for the last few years the Ombudsman has noted a downward trend in housing complaints and enquiries. I am pleased that this trend continues, to the extent, according to the Ombudsman, that we should see housing issues being removed from the top of the complaints league. Housing has always been a  
410 very difficult sector, but it is indeed very gratifying to read such an acknowledgement because it is even more gratifying that the logical effect is that we are assisting more people and more people are happier with the service.

Turning to equality, Mr Speaker, as a Government we have demonstrated a strong track record on equality in our first term and this will, of course, continue our work as we strive for a  
415 more inclusive community.

Mr Speaker, having introduced the civil partnership legislation in our first term in office, the most live issue at present is our manifesto commitment with regard to amendments to the Marriage Act to make it equal for all. As you are aware, in our manifesto we set ourselves a  
420 commitment and a time-line for June. We have already undertaken the consultation process, but given the results of the Referendum, we have been overtaken by events and we seek the indulgence of the electorate for a little longer, but that does not mean that we have lost sight of this matter at all.

In July last year the Equal Opportunities Act was amended to include transgender individuals as a class protected from discrimination and we are working with other Government  
425 Departments on progressing policies in this regard as appropriate.

A lot of work, Mr Speaker, has been undertaken on the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Disabled, including substantial consultation with stakeholders and we are finalising documentation to be able to give this effect. This is not the only progress  
430 on the rights of people with disabilities and we continue to make progress to assist individuals with disabilities and have introduced various important measures throughout the year, already.

There has also been substantial training, both for the private and public sector, on accessibility to premises as we prepare for the introduction of regulations to make buildings  
435 accessible compulsory. Importantly, as part of our work in life planning for the disabled, the Department is spearheading an inter-agency working group with a view to formulating a strategy for people with autism and assisting, as well, people with other learning disabilities.

I also continue to undertake work on gender equality, and this year numerous awareness events have been arranged while we continue to work on the substantive matters on this front. Mr Speaker, this is an area where I am greatly assisted by the support of professionals and  
440 groups in the voluntary sector with whom I work very closely, and I wish to thank all those who have provided professional and practical guidance.

Mr Speaker, my final portfolio is, of course, Social Services. The development in this department is ongoing. In the same way, the needs of our community and society change, the service ensures that it adapts and models its services to reflect this. The users of Social Services  
445

encounter in their lives issues which affect many facets and dimensions and the inter agency teams that work to support them have embraced this.

450 I am happy to report that there now seems to be a deeper understanding that Social Services does not work in isolation from other Government Departments. The Social Services Department of the Care Agency provides for children, vulnerable adults, adults with learning disabilities and individuals suffering from addiction.

455 The driving force in Children's Services is the understanding that children want to grow up within their families and the opportunity to grow up in a safe, healthy, family unit is what Social Services aspires for every child. It is for this reason that the dynamic of Children's Services has now changed to promote early intervention to avoid future difficulties such as criminality, substance abuse and domestic abuse from arising.

460 One of the flagship successes, which I am very proud of in the service this year, has been the Adoption and Fostering Service and its development as a way of providing a family life for children who cannot live with their own parents. The Care Agency celebrated its first Fostering and Adoption Awareness Week in October 2015. The success of the campaign has been reflected in the number of children placed with foster parents and family placements in the last few months, as opposed to institutional care. This is a great achievement for children. Training of 465 potential foster and adoptive parents has greatly improved and it helps individuals cope with the sometimes contentious issue of fostering within a small community. The success of the fostering initiative has had an effect on Residential Services, which is undergoing a restructure, as the team there work very closely with the family placements to ensure their success.

470 The process for leaving care children has also been greatly improved, thereby achieving a better result for children who grow up and leave the residential service, but for whom there continues to be support from Social Services where necessary to assist them with their transition to adulthood and independence.

475 The team from Adult Services, who assist vulnerable adults, aged 18 or over, principally support individuals to live safely and independently in the community. This is generally achieved through a multi-disciplinary approach with social workers, carers and other agencies. This year, the service received a total of 472 referrals for social work assessment and support. There is an increasing amount of referrals from the public and self-referrals, and this is as a result of the growing confidence in this service.

480 They are also responsible for the running of the day centre for the elderly at Waterport Terraces, such a valuable investment, Mr Speaker, for the benefit of our elderly community who are able to spend time in this warm and caring environment.

Domiciliary care, of course, continues to be provided to assist vulnerable, elderly or infirm people at home. We constantly monitor this service for clinical standards as well as to ensure that it runs on a cost efficient basis.

485 Social workers are now integrated in hospital and multi-disciplinary teams and bed management meetings which ensures better planning of services and a seamless approach to care. At present, we have 220 individuals receiving care at home through Social Services. This enables elderly people to remain at home safely and independently for longer and in line with their wishes.

490 During this financial year, the focus of the Disability Service has been the emphasis on continued improvements to ensure the highest standards and quality of care are provided at St Bernadette's and Dr Giraldi Home. We have engaged the services of an external consultant to assist in the development of the service and assessment of individual service users. We have refurbished St Bernadette's to improve it and make it more accessible and completely 495 refurbished the sensory room, which is so core to our service.

Finally, turning to addiction rehabilitation and outreach and community services provided by the Care Agency; this Government, Mr Speaker, and all of us who are responsible for drug and alcohol abuse treatment in different ways, are totally and equally committed to assist those who may suffer from this.

500 Mr Speaker, the hon. gentleman opposite yesterday mentioned that he has met with addicts  
in recovery and is learning from what he hears. Mr Speaker, that is so important, and that is  
exactly what I have been doing for over four years. And Minister Linares, as well, who held this  
portfolio last year, because this is how we have shaped our policies and led the service to where  
it is. What it is, Mr Speaker, is a far cry from what it was when we first came in. And I am sure  
505 that what I found in 2011 is not what Mr Corby, who initially set up Bruce's Farm, left either. I  
know what we inherited, Mr Speaker. I was there, I saw it – an empty, dilapidated Bruce's Farm,  
forgotten and neglected by the GSD, and I am not referring to the building, I am referring to the  
people who needed it at that time. But I do not wish to dwell on the past, Mr Speaker, because  
we have to move on and we have to move forward, and that is not what this service is about.

510 In previous answers to questions I have stated that occupancy levels at Bruce's Farm are  
higher than ever. Well, guess what, Mr Speaker? Last month I was delighted to be faced with the  
problem that it was full to capacity. This had not happened for at least 12 years, and it shows  
that the system is now working and help is being provided. Incidentally, Mr Speaker, on that  
occasion I asked the staff to immediately buy bunkbeds as a temporary measure as I wanted to  
515 ensure, as I always have, that people who ask for help and seek to be admitted always are.

Beyond Bruce's Farm we have important manifesto commitments to meet on a wider  
strategy. We are working very hard to achieve this, and once our ambitions are implemented,  
we will transform how drugs misuse and its damaging consequences are dealt with in our  
community.

520 This is certainly an area where inter-agency working together is crucial for success, as is  
engagement with charities and the voluntary sector, with whom I meet frequently, and they  
know they have an open door and my full support.

The significance of the progress of the Care Agency is the overall improvement over the past  
few years. This has been achieved principally through the employment of staff in a service which  
525 never had a full complement, of either professionals or administrative support. And, Mr Speaker,  
it is also very important to note that the administrative support in the Care Agency is the  
backbone and the essential support to the professionals.

Social Services – as an essential service – has seen growth posts of key staff in our first term  
in office and we are clearly seeing the results of this valuable investment. One of the key  
530 functions outside the day-to-day professional work is the outreach careers work that is  
undertaken by staff to encourage, especially children in schools, to consider a career in care,  
whether it be as a social worker, in care or nursing. We are keen to invest in the future of this  
service.

535 Finally, Mr Speaker, I would like to give credit to Mr Albert Bruzon who retired as the CEO of  
the Care Agency at the end of last year. Albert is a kind man and someone who holds strong  
principles and values and has dedicated his career to working in the public sector. Albert  
stepped in as CEO of the Care Agency over three years ago, at a very difficult time, and helped  
steer the ship and give it the balance it has today. Being at the helm of this incredibly challenging  
and demanding organisation is not an easy task, nor is it putting up with a most demanding part  
540 of it, Mr Speaker, and that is yours truly. After a short period of retirement, Albert has agreed to  
return to work with me again, but in my ministerial office on a part-time basis. I am grateful that  
he has, and I look forward to working with him again, his role will now be different, but no less  
important.

545 This year has also seen the retirement of Debbie Guinn, the Head of Service of the Adult  
Social Work Team. Debbie is a true professional, a kind and gentle lady, who has dedicated her  
career to helping others and has done a lot for social services in Gibraltar, and from whom I have  
learnt a lot. I wish her well, but ask that she does not go too far, either.

550 It just leaves me to thank everybody who works with me, Mr Speaker, either on a daily basis  
or in my departments or in the departments that I call upon for support from time to time. I  
have numerous departments that I am responsible for, Mr Speaker, and I work closely with  
senior management and officials to progress each service for the benefit of those relying on it.

So I could not make progress without their support. My portfolio is vast, varied and very demanding, with very real and live issues and of late also requires a lot of travel.

555 So, Mr Speaker, my team, particularly those in my immediate ministerial office, while a very small team, are very hardworking and dedicated, and help me keep everything together. They provide me with day-to-day support and also co-ordinate with all the departments and sectors that I am responsible for. Together, Mr Speaker, we will all continue to work hard in order to deliver what we have committed to in our manifesto.

Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

560

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Lawrence Llamas.

**Hon. L F Llamas:** Mr Speaker, I am proud and privileged to be delivering my maiden Budget address. The past seven months have been a defined learning curve for me. Sitting on this side of the House is certainly proving advantageous. Mr Speaker, I shall be taking your advice from question time and making a short and important statement.

570 I have to start my speech with what I feel is the most important issue that is depriving people of basic human rights in our society, and even though we keep on hearing promises: that is the delay in bringing to this Parliament the Disability Bill, adopting the UN Convention. With a Command Paper having been issued months before the last general election, to further delay bringing the Bill to Parliament – given it is a 2011 manifesto commitment – is unjustifiable. Any continued stalling will only harvest bucket loads of sour lemons. (*Banging on desks*). It is simply reprehensible for Government to drag its feet on this one and reply with their rhetorical answers.

575 Yes, it is easier to blame a previous Government for delays, but we are not here to question previous administrations, we are here to progress by working with and scrutinising the administration of the day. I do not have to shoulder the blame of past administrations, in the same way as you are not reminded of historical issues. (*Interjection*)

580 The UN Convention was published in 2006. The person on the street does not care who did what and when; what the person out there wants to hear is why is it taking 10 years for Parliament to bring this legislation. (*Banging on desks*)

585 I must stress that, when it finally makes its way through these doors, I expect it not to be the watered-down version published in the Command Paper and, instead, it takes on board the hard work done in preparing the Disability Bill between 2006 and 2011, which Government wants to pretend never existed even though all stakeholders have copies.

I understand that representations have been made to Government by stakeholders with their concerns and advice, and I truly hope Government listens and adopts the UN Convention in its full version.

590 On the other hand, I am able and pleased to congratulate Government on its achievements in making public areas, such as playgrounds, inclusive for those with disabilities. It is gratifying to see playgrounds where children of all capabilities are having fun. I hope to see more of this in the future.

I welcome the estimate item to finally include a lift in Parliament House. I know of a particular person who will be making continuous use of that lift.

595 Returning to another area of pussyfooting is the delay in providing a Family Centre, which was an issue of concern for this administration during their terms in Opposition and which has fallen down the waistline, with one parliamentary term having already elapsed and yet not seeing the opening of this centre.

600 Another important area which is proving difficult to assess is the situation which I believe exists in the Care Agency but is almost impossible to scrutinise, and that is the influx of subcontracted workers. I have, however, been able to identify that 48 subcontracted workers were working under the disabilities umbrella as at February 2016 out of a potential complement of 95. Astounding though it is, this means that more than half of the personnel is subcontracted.

605 I make this point on the basis of the limited information I have, and which is publicly available, in  
the hope that the Members opposite can prove me wrong during this parliamentary session.  
This would make a welcome departure from the smokescreens and diversions to which we have  
become accustomed from the other side of this House on this subject. (*Banging on desks*)

610 These workers receive basic training and are entrusted with tending to the needs of the most  
vulnerable members in our society. It now transpires that there is no independent regulator and  
that Government regulates the contracted parties. This is wrong in any sector, but when we are  
talking about the most vulnerable people in our community, it is completely and utterly  
intolerable and shocks me to the core. Government should not play a surety part in this venture  
at all. There should be a robust body – such as the FSC in its jurisdiction, as the GRA in its  
jurisdiction, as is the Environmental Agency in its jurisdiction – that can professionally and  
615 independently review this sector without fear or favour.

We understand that annual leave, maternity leave and sick leave may give rise for a need to  
seek assistance from recruitment agencies in order to keep the services running. However, this  
should not be in lieu of employing and training long-term staff. Furthermore, there is a bigger  
issue than just long-term employment for workers, but also the long-term continuity for the  
620 service users. There are service users who cannot tolerate sudden short-term changes, and  
these should be avoided at all cost. Cover should be sourced from the existing team of staff and  
not externally.

This also gives rise to a slow-developing workforce, who are not trained as they evolve but  
rather become stagnant and unmotivated. As a result, the sector is run on a continuous  
625 firefighting mode instead of having a robust human resources' policy and management, which  
not only guarantees continuity of service but also factors in long-term training requirements.

I strongly believe a Care Quality Commission is pivotal to the success of the Care Agency,  
Elderly Care Services, the GHA and Domiciliary Care. It monitors and assesses the quality of the  
care being delivered and rates it accordingly. It does so with full independence and freedom.  
630 This, coupled with an individual Carers' Support Plan and supportive carer policies, would truly  
take Gibraltar to a different level, in line with other modern, forward-thinking societies around  
the world.

Stay-home, unpaid carers should be recognised by Government in as many ways as possible,  
from enhanced employment conditions, respite, financial benefits, training and advice. Some of  
635 these may be available to certain carers who have sympathetic employers, but it is important to  
provide an accessible legislative framework in this area so that it is open to scrutiny, clear, and  
available to all recognised care-givers. We should be working together on cross-party policies  
that are for the benefit of those who elect us – beyond elections, beyond administrations, and  
beyond party politics.

640 On a more positive note, I am pleased to see an item in the estimates for Project Search. I am  
surprised it has not been mentioned in this Budget session, even though it is in the Budget book.  
We strongly believe this to be an improvement on the current Supported Employment Scheme  
(SEC) given its tried and tested structure in the UK.

It will enable young adults to grow within a framework, whilst at the same time supporting  
645 employers in each individual placement. It is all about creating awareness and destigmatising the  
employment of individuals with learning and/or physical disabilities in the private sector. I look  
forward to seeing the progress made by this initiative in the upcoming months and trust that  
those currently employed under the SEC scheme will be transferred onto Project Search so they  
may also benefit from this initiative.

650 It has also been encouraging to see and I welcome the awareness campaign in fostering and  
adoption. This initiative must be maintained and expanded in order to achieve the results we all  
want to see, and are currently seeing.

As well as the evident usage of fertility clinics revealed in last week's question and answer  
session, IVF services, formally introduced by this administration for those unable to naturally  
655 conceive, is proving successful.

Moving onto the administrative aspect of the Health Care, the Primary Care Centre, we understand and accept it is a work in progress. No administration has got it 100% right; however, it is important for Government to listen to both complaints made directly to them and from the Opposition benches. The system is leading to many cases left unattended for days and weeks, long waiting times on the phones and complicated systems which our elderly in particular find difficult to comprehend. This, inevitably, has a knock-on effect on the overuse of the A&E Department and causes unnecessary delays there.

We also see a huge amount of cancelled operations. We have no reason to doubt the Hon. Minister for Health when he suggests that the majority of cases are not due to the GHA's inability to perform the surgery, but the fact remains that the number of cancelled operations due to bed shortages is staggering. I hope that these will diminish with the eventual opening of the long overdue Dementia Residential Facility.

Once this is opened, it will inevitably not be enough. We are living longer and the older generations need to have infrastructure and policies to cater for their needs. One example which we need to materialise is the accessibility of older people in private accommodation who are unable to access Albert Risso, Bishop Canilla and the upcoming houses. I hope Government initiates, in this area, a user-subsidised residential accommodation where this demographic can enjoy their independence albeit in a suitable infrastructure. *(Banging on desks)*

I have to congratulate the Government on their MS Nurse initiative, which I understand is providing the support and accessibility MS sufferers so needed.

Additionally, we fully support and congratulate the Government on the organ transplant program, which this Government has initiated and enacted on, seeing already one successful case.

We also look forward to the Oncology Centre being in operation and hope it provides the treatment to as many sufferers as possible so they can avoid the added inconvenience of travelling outside Gibraltar for treatment.

Moving on to Tourism, which I feel is an important area for Gibraltar regardless of which political party is in Government and where we should therefore try and develop ideas and steer away from partisan politics as much as possible.

The Government prides itself on the upward trend, but this is following a sharp drop during their first term in office. The Government have spent £4.37 million on tourism marketing over the past four years. One would expect to see tangible results as a result of this level of investment in the tourist sector.

I will accept and congratulate the staff involved in the increase of air passengers and reiterate the fact that the new terminal has allowed for air connectivity for the expansion which could simply not have been possible from the old terminal, let alone parking the planes in the old layout. However, what Gibraltar is crying out for are more connections to cities in mainland Europe. I hope this will become a priority for those involved and wish them all the best in achieving these exciting results.

In cruise passenger figures, I note with pleasure the work carried out in order to restore the levels of passengers that were enjoyed during the GSD's golden age period in office. *(Laughter)* I would now urge those concerned to motivate cruise liners to stay for longer.

Looking through the statistics, there are many cruise liners who only spend a few hours in the port, meaning that passengers have limited leisure and retail time. In many cases, because of their early arrival, in the early hours of the morning, the time available to them in Gibraltar does not even coincide with the opening hours of the Upper Rock Nature Reserve – as well as stifling potential tourist expenditure, the true Gibraltar experience is minimal.

In terms of land frontier figures, there is a drop of 15% between 2011 and 2015. This drop is sufficient to stifle the overall figure of tourists entering Gibraltar. This downward trend is also the case in tourist expenditure, where we are seeing a 29% drop from 2011 to 2015. If the levels of tourist expenditure seen in 2010 and 2011 had been maintained, this would translate into a

tourist expenditure loss of £300 million over the last four years, and all this Mr Speaker, whilst spending unprecedented levels of investment in marketing.

710 These figures are important, Mr Speaker; they cannot be ignored. This trend affects traders and businesses in our streets, which is why I have made the point in the past that the tourist sector is a pillar of our economy; one which can grow in a sustainable manner but not to be meddled with irresponsibly; one that must be handled with care. We can throw all the money you want at marketing, but if we do not have the root and branch planning, organisation and infrastructure, the tourist experience is soured and the long-term vision is impeded.

715 For example, Mr Speaker, we have always maintained, from our first press release following the foreign vehicle ban to the Upper Rock, that we agree with this measure. We were providing ways in which this policy could be implemented in the best way possible for all concerned, with the tourist experience at heart. Additionally, we were urging Government to exempt those with disabilities from the ban. The latter is claimed to have been taken on board, even though there is  
720 nothing on the Visit Gibraltar website to indicate that this is the case, and I quote from the website:

No unauthorised private vehicles are permitted in the nature reserve, however a number of walking, taxi or bus tours are available.

On this basis, Mr Speaker, unless you are on an organised tour, you are unable to visit the Upper Rock, and clarification needs to be provided.

Of course, this will impact negatively on the level of revenue to Government from the Upper  
725 Rock site entrance fees, but where is the infrastructure and the tourist experience? Yes, we have seen unprecedented levels of investment in the Upper Rock: £1.8 million investment on flashy gimmicks between the Suspension Bridge and Mount Misery Lookout – which at a personal level I love as I am an adrenalin junkie; I really, really like them. However, we are still seeing filthy water habitats for the macaques and inadequate priority and foresight to improve the basic  
730 health and safety for tourists by introducing balustrades. Whilst we are encouraging tourists to walk around the Upper Rock, this is an accident waiting to happen.

Europa Point is another tourist hot spot; it is visited by millions of tourists every year. It is an idyllic location, overlooking the majestic Straits of Gibraltar, yet the old shop that was demolished has been left there as an eyesore – a simple provisional landscaping of the site could  
735 have at least brought the land in line with the rest of the area – not to mention the state to which the popular playground, built by the GSD Government, has been allowed to deteriorate. What is the point, Mr Speaker, in permitting the destruction of a popular area which is enjoyed by so many Gibraltarians just to score cheap political points? Surely the community comes first, or do the Members opposite care only about votes at election time?

740 Moving on to another of my assigned portfolios, the Port. The Gibraltar Port recurrent revenue is coming in at staggering downward figures. The tonnage dues once enjoyed by Gibraltar of £4.3 million at a peak in 2012-13 have disintegrated to £2.6 million estimated for 2016-17. If the up-going trend up until 2012-13 had at least been levelled and maintained, Government would have had an extra £4 million to play with, more over the last three years and  
745 £6 million by this time next year. Where is this money going to? Our neighbours across the bay?

On a lesser scale, the same can be said for the bunkering revenue, from nearly breaking the million pound mark in 2010-11, the forecast for 2016-17 is a measly £400,000 in comparison. It is safe to say that approximately £1 million of revenue has been lost, probably due to migration of business across the shores, meaning local businesses are also losing out in these trades. It is a  
750 worrying downward trend and I genuinely hope to see an upward trend in both these areas.

Still, Mr Speaker, we have a beautiful small boats' marina, coming in at £24 million. Seven hundred lucky owners have been gifted berths to the tune of £34,000 each, in exchange for which they are liable to pay service charges to a sinking fund for the maintenance of the same.



755 If this is not a clear example of the culture of entitlement we have so often spoken about, I do not know what is. The cost of each berth, which has been gifted to each user, is roughly equivalent to the 50:50 mortgages which the new homeowners have had to obtain under the recent affordable housing schemes. It simply does not make sense.

760 It is not all bad, though: it has brought back recreational fishing as we used to enjoy in the North Mole, and I am happy for those who have obtained the berth – good for them. I hope Government will publish the successful applicants so that the electorate can see that it has been a fair process.

765 As a stand-alone project, it clearly has its merits. In the context of prudent management of our economy, particularly with the threat of an EU referendum looming over us at the time, I am convinced that there are much more meritorious projects which could have been prioritised, such as the dementia facilities, St Martin’s School and all the other schools for that matter. **(A Member: Hear, hear.)** *(Banging on desks)*

770 I must say, we welcome the new yacht registry being prepared – it will see the requirement for vessel insurance amongst other important prerequisites – together with welcoming the Fast Launch Act amendment. I highlighted both issues recently in a Viewpoint programme where I stated that these measures should have coincided with the opening of the Midtown marina before owners began to purchase their vessels. Having said that, I must say we were actually told about the amendment on the Fast Launch Act by a seller up the coast who already knew that this was coming into force before it was even published. *(Interjection)* No, it is not consulting; it is people volunteering information.

775 Moving swiftly on to animal welfare issues, it is sad to note this Government’s abysmal failure in respect of investing in dog parks. The £25,000 investment out of an earmarked £50,000 last year at the Alameda Gardens has seen an attempt to convert a footpath into a park, but unfortunately it is still a long way away. As highlighted back in January, the surface needs rethinking as well as the basic fencing and gating of the area. Unfortunately, I can only say it looks like a waste of money from where I am sitting or standing. Looking from the Estimates Book, it looks like no further investment will be directed that way in the current financial year leaving the gloomy area as it is and the plans shown to the public as a mirage – something which will inevitably not go down well with dog owners in Gibraltar, especially in light of the 500% increase in dog licenses and 250% hike in dog registrations as from November. Clearly, you are better off owning a boat than a dog! *(Laughter and banging on desks)*

780 I understand that the increase in licenses is to subsidise the DNA testing to match dog fouling to its owner: a measure which I fully support; however, it is sad to see that this model which has been mimicked from the Island of Capri will not be met with the equivalent fine for offenders of €2,000 as exists in Capri. The money from irresponsible owners should be subsidising this venture and not just the responsible owner.

790 I hope to be given the opportunity to work with Government on issues of concern and adequate management and care of feral street cats, breeding and sale of pets, welfare and neglect, and all other areas in which we are underdeveloped and need modernising.

795 Finally, Mr Speaker, I wish to thank you, the Clerk, and his staff, for the help and support you have all provided me with in the short time as a Member of this House.

I would like to end by reminding the House that I come in good faith to hold the Government to account, as well as to ensure that its policies and commitments are fulfilled effectively and justly – and congratulate them when they do so.

Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

800

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Steven Linares.

**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Steven Linares.

805 **Minister for Sports, Culture, Heritage and Youth (Hon. S E Linares):** Mr Speaker, it is an honour and privilege to deliver as Minister for Sports, Culture, Heritage, Youth and Civic Rights my fifth Budget speech to this House.

The Civic Rights aspects of my portfolio are two main areas. The first is that of the Office of the Ombudsman and his team. We provide guidance and support when required.

810 The second is the Citizens Advice Bureau, which is known as CAB for short. Both these offices are run as independent entities. However, they are funded by the taxpayer, therefore it is my duty to monitor their expenditure and their role; and for this reason I am accountable to this House. This has been the procedure since the two organisations were established.

815 Since mediation was introduced in Gibraltar in 2010, UK Mediation has partnered with CAB to develop and grow mediation services locally. Four staff members from the Gibraltar Bureau are now accredited and trained mediators after obtaining the Mediation Practitioner's Certificate which is accredited by a number of UK institutions. This certificate equips them to resolve disputes and complaints involving employment, consumer, neighbourhood and family issues.

820 CAB is running the Here2Help website. This website is being used to spread the word through social media networks and showcase volunteer and community needs. They have inspired charities to work together and advise how people can volunteer for their respective organisations. This gives members of the public an opportunity to find out what roles are on offer, to allow them to take part in events and to take inspiration to help communities through volunteering.

825 Their website's address is [www.here2help.gi](http://www.here2help.gi)

CAB has also initiated a Money Advice Clinic as part of the services that it offers; this has increased client contacts this year. The aim of this clinic is to help clients stabilise their financial situation so that they can safeguard their homes and their belongings, have sufficient money to feed and clothe their families, and pay their debts at an affordable rate.

830 Mr Speaker, the Money Advice process is a systematic way of working with clients to achieve this aim. CAB works in partnership with the Utility Companies and it uses Community Care officers with a financial or banking background to assist clients in this process as part of their community care duties.

835 CAB staff have been engaged in giving presentations and talks under their 'Staying safe with Advice' campaign. This covered energy saving advice and other safety information. The campaign targeted senior citizens who feel more comfortable in their own homes, those in elderly accommodation or elsewhere. However, this comfort can also reduce awareness of hazards that could lead to injury. Accurate information, advice and planning are essential to their well-being. The Bureau was joined by the essential services in this campaign. Together,  
840 they issued wallet-sized cards with useful numbers to senior citizens for them to call in the event of an emergency.

Mr Speaker, I now move on to the Office of the Ombudsman.

845 In the past year the Ombudsman's Office has been given responsibility to handle GHA complaints. The Office now also deals with ADR and reports on complaints against Government Departments and related bodies.

The Ombudsman assumed responsibilities for health-related complaints from May 2015. This was in accordance with our 2011 manifesto. Government also provided funds for two extra members of staff. An office sited at St Bernard's Hospital, to provide an *in situ* service to deal with complaints and enquiries, was also provided.

850 This new task has proved to be quite challenging with a very steep learning curve. The aim of the Ombudsman and his team is to meet the expectations of the service user whilst never forgetting the GHA staff themselves. It is important to point out that in the vast majority of instances the staff provides an excellent service and standard of care.

855 May I take this opportunity to congratulate the Ombudsman and his team for the professional manner in which they have handled complaints against the GHA.

Mr Speaker, in June 2015 the Consumer (Alternative Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2015 came into force. The Public Services Ombudsman was named as the Competent and Reporting Authority for Gibraltar. The responsibilities of the Ombudsman grew as a result of this and the Office attracted an increased workload. Government has made available an extra officer to be  
860 redeployed to assist the Ombudsman with this task.

ADR is a means by which a consumer may wish to resolve a dispute with a trader or service provider. These provisions are aimed at consumers and have no effect in disputes between traders.

865 Ever since the Ombudsman first became operational in Gibraltar this office has always aimed to deliver the best possible service to those who seek their assistance. To this effect members of staff as well as the Ombudsman continue to travel abroad to learn about the service which is provided elsewhere. The Ombudsman regularly attends ombudsman meetings, conferences and seminars.

870 The Office in Gibraltar belongs to different organisations and this contact is used in order to keep abreast of the developments in the Ombudsman world. Their stated aim is to consistently make their office a beacon of not only good administration but also of excellence in the delivery of service to the people of Gibraltar.

875 Mr Speaker, as a result of these meetings, the Ombudsman has recently introduced a Systems Improvement Officer – called a SIO. He has designated a member of his staff to undertake the responsibilities of SIO which will include, amongst other things, ensuring that the Ombudsman's recommendations have been put into effect and actioned. Other aspects of this role will include undertaking a review of their own internal working methods and procedures.

880 The Ombudsman is always conscious that they owe a duty of service to those who seek their assistance and is therefore keen to ensure that their service delivery is on target, or whether it needs improving.

885 Mr Speaker, I will move on now to the Youth Service. Over the past year the Gibraltar Youth Service has undergone a number of significant changes, most noticeably within its structure and staffing arrangements. This has led to an increase in face-to-face work with more young people, and we are also reaching out to other Government Departments, agencies and NGOs. The Youth Service is working with them by advocating an improvement and better services for young people in our community.

890 The administration for the Gibraltar Youth Service continues to be based at the main offices of the Ministry of Culture where the staff continues to provide support for the Youth Service. The professional complement at the Youth Service consists of a Principal Youth Officer, two Senior Youth Workers and five Youth and Community Workers.

895 Since September 2015 all Youth Service staff members have completed a consultation with Unite the Union, the Human Resources Department and Government legal officers. In November 2015, as a result of that consultation, the Gibraltar Youth Service produced a set of policies and procedures called 'Delivering Youth Work in Gibraltar'. These sets of policies and procedures have now been adopted by all staff members who work in the Youth Work team.

900 Mr Speaker, the Youth Work team is complemented by supply Youth Support Workers who provide backing to the full time Youth and Community Work team. The Youth Service has worked very closely with Human Resources in regularising the employment status of all employees.

The Service has continued to work closely with Human Resources and Unite to ensure that we support our employees by putting measures and systems in place. These measures and systems have ensured that we continue to maintain and raise the standard of our Youth and Community Work team as we aim for best practice.

905 Mr Speaker, in addition to supporting the work carried out at the Youth Clubs and Youth Projects we have once again offered the locally recognised and assessed course in

'Understanding Youth Work' to volunteers and prospective Youth Support Workers. This year, trainees were given a choice between the assessed or the non-assessed route. The non-assessed route offered the trainee a certificate of attendance along with the chance to volunteer their services to various youth work projects.

910 Due to the success of their training, plans are at an advanced stage to offer Understanding Youth Work training to anyone interested in working with young people from October 2016.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Service is committed to personal professional development and it constantly continues to update its skills audit of all its employees. All full time employees and some Youth Support Workers have undergone training in the following areas: Safeguarding  
915 Children Tier 1, Health and Safety, First Aid at Work, Basic Fire and Rescue Training. In addition, two Youth Support Workers have recently completed Food Hygiene Courses.

The Youth Service is a member of the Child Protection Committee and, following a request by the Care Agency in November 2015, the Youth Service agreed to join the Safeguarding Children and Young People training team as from January 2016.

920 In January 2016 all Youth Service staff underwent a very successful and inspiring weekend of personal professional development training organised by the Youth Service itself. This was delivered by Moira Smith and Lesley Buckland who are renowned academics from the YMCA, George Williams College.

The Government, Mr Speaker, has invested in people and in facilities and during the past year  
925 both Dolphins and Plater Youth Clubs have undergone significant refurbishment. In addition to their current facilities, these now have new modern and up-to-date kitchens for young people to use and learn necessary life skills.

On Thursday 17th September 2015 the Youth Service and the Royal Gibraltar Police signed a Memorandum of Understanding to consolidate the areas of joint working which both  
930 organisations carry out. This has allowed the two organisations to build a professional relationship of trust to address any issues that young people may have in the actual youth clubs and also in the wider community.

The Youth Advisory Council has been expanded; the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Guides and Scouts have provided advice to Government about issues that affect young people. In order to  
935 improve services for young people we have included representatives in the Council from the RGP, the Department of Education, the GHA, the Care Agency and also the Drugs Co-ordinator.

As Minister for Youth, I felt it important to give young people a voice in our community. The Youth Service set up a Youth Forum and a number of meetings were arranged which included  
940 members of this forum where these young people raised any issue that they wanted. As a result of the meetings, young people have had the opportunity to meet with my colleague, Minister Sacramento, and I at the Youth Centre and to discuss a number of matters. This went very well.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Service is working closely with young people and advocating on their behalf so that the issues raised by them are taken seriously and acted upon. Members of the Youth Forum also met the GHA General Manager, Mr Darion Figueredo and the Director of  
945 Education, Joey Britto. This forum will continue to expand. There will be more meetings arranged in order to give our young people the opportunity to raise issues that concern them.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Service has a well-established working relationship with the Department of Education. We have worked very effectively together with Bayside and Westside Schools and with the College of Further Education. In order to reach out to more young people  
950 the senior team held a meeting with the Director of Education recently. They agreed that the Youth Service would start work with the school Year 7 pupils from all middle schools. This initiative has been extended to private schools with a view to offer the services of the Department and to reach out to as many young people as possible in our community.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Service has been involved in organising many events for young people.  
955 These events have included residentials, attending outdoor pursuit trips, fundraising, projects such as Healthy Lifestyle, environmental awareness, and performing and production. The aim is

to make our young people conscious of their rights and responsibilities and that they are an important party of the society that they belong to.

960 Mr Speaker, the Youth Service is an extremely busy Department which has been leading on and successfully achieving many projects, thanks to the very committed workforce. With the new Youth and Community Workers in post, and as the team continues to develop their profession they hope to continue their successes. The Government looks forward to an even busier and more promising year ahead where the needs of young people will always be at the top of the agenda.

965 I would like to take this opportunity to thank the management and staff of the Youth Service.

I would also like to thank the Luce Foundation which helps out the Youth Service by helping them fund many of the projects that they deliver.

970 Mr Speaker, I move on now to Heritage matters. Throughout this busy year we have been consolidating existing works in anticipation of future projects. The Department has committed itself to securing and following through on a number of important projects. The Museum-led World Heritage bid for Gorham Caves and the surrounding area is progressing well.

975 The Gibraltar Museum team has been working tirelessly to finalise our bid, its contents and its public outreach components. To this end, a whole new wing of the Museum was recently inaugurated on International Museum Day. This new wing exhibits ground-breaking Neanderthal models, state-of-the-art interpretation panels and previously unseen items from over 20 years of research at Gorham's Cave.

This year the museum open day was a resounding success with over 1,700 visitors, which is a new record.

980 On the ground itself, access to and protection of the caves has been guaranteed through the construction of new walkways. A partial approximation of the Neanderthal environment has been reconstructed with the successful introduction of tamarisk plants. This will be extended in the coming years.

985 It is a tribute to the museum team led by Prof. Clive Finlayson and Dr Gerry Finlayson that they have been able, almost single-handedly, to bring together the necessary expertise, drive and knowledge to produce this world-class bid. Whatever happens, there can be no doubt that this is a world-class site of outstanding universal value.

990 Professor Gabriel Cooney – the World Heritage Site Evaluator on behalf of ICOMOS – was suitably impressed by the exceptional progress of the site. As part of the ongoing five-year management plan supporting the bid, they produced a film called 'Making of the Neanderthal models'. The film will assist to give publicity to the growing Gibraltar Neanderthal experience. This has been aided by new cutting-edge documentaries by BBC and GBC, a brand new website, as well as ongoing research at the cave complex.

Although the final result of our bid will only be known within a few days, our commitment to exhibiting and enhancing our Neanderthal past will endure.

995 Mr Speaker, the Ministry for Heritage has continued to refurbish the City Hall, following the opening of our National Art Gallery. I can now inform this House that a lift has been installed and that plans are afoot to consolidate the façade of the building as well as refurbishment of the Mayor's Parlour. In subsequent years we will be able to count on an even bigger and better National Gallery and a fitting hall for our mayors and their functions. This will include the housing of all the Government's collection of artworks and the development of the third floor, once Gibtelecom moves out to its new premises.

As we said in our 2011 manifesto, the City Hall will be a cultural building.

1005 Mr Speaker, a monument to Gibraltar's fallen from both World Wars was recently erected at the National Arboretum in the UK. Carved out of our own limestone, conceived by Mr Joe Brugada and designed by Mr Anselmo Torres, the monument stands as a fitting tribute to those Gibraltarians who gave their lives in these conflicts. As the living witnesses of these past conflicts fade, their names will live for evermore. They fought against oppression in the past, for a better future.

1010 Mr Speaker, in this year's estimates we have provided funds for a monument to women in Gibraltar. This has been a project that has gone out to public participation in the form of a competition and which we will be commissioning in the next few months. The monument will also fulfil another manifesto commitment.

The Government is looking to finalise the Gibraltar Heritage and Antiquities Act. I am happy to report that this legislation is now near completion.

1015 The public consultation period is over and we have received many insightful comments. These have been looked at, often amending the Bill as it stood. The process has considerably improved the end product. I would like to thank all those who sent their views and visions concerning our heritage. The final Bill will be a combination of many ideas. The role of the Government has been to temper hope with reality, conservation with mitigation.

1020 As I said last year, and I reiterate on this occasion, this Bill will set an important benchmark, bringing Gibraltar firmly into the twenty-first century insofar as heritage best practice is concerned. Aside from greatly deepening our heritage protection, we will have in place comprehensive and exacting listed-building legislation, protection of monuments and a legislative framework for developer-funded archaeology and heritage recording.

1025 Mr Speaker, through the efforts of the Heritage Department working closely with the Government's Planning Department, much of the proposed legislation has already become commonplace guidance for the day-to-day running and recording of our heritage. In this, the private sector has also been instrumental. Where we have led, they have followed; and I can honestly say that the future prospects for the protection of our heritage is better now than at  
1030 any point in the last twenty years.

During 2015 and 2016 we have worked together with developers to combine development with conservation. The results could not be clearer, from the restoration of previously neglected World War Two structures, the undertaking and standardisation of archaeological watching briefs and the increasing frequency of historical desk-based assessments means that we are  
1035 recording our past at an unprecedented rate. And I hasten to add that this is being done without restricting the building developments that Gibraltar demands and needs.

In the last year we have shown that heritage protection does not hamper development, indeed it enhances it by helping to preserve the past in our construction of Gibraltar's future. Needless to say, this would not have been possible without the unstinting support of the  
1040 Gibraltar Heritage Trust who have advised, remonstrated and broadly agreed with our views. Their vision and impartiality is much appreciated.

As for the future, we have an exciting year ahead of us which will see the completion of the Wellington Front refurbishment and numerous other projects. For instance, we are looking into management plans to restore our walls to their ancient standard. We aim to start small but  
1045 envisage a three-year plan where, working closely with the Department of the Environment, we will start removing plants and tidying up our city walls. This will complement, and work in close tandem with, the Government's urban regeneration programme which aims to consolidate and enhance our Old Town product.

Mr Speaker, in collaboration with the Gibraltar National Archives we have started a project  
1050 entitled 'Mapping our Past', whereby all the old maps of Gibraltar will be scanned and placed online for all to be able to access. Not only will this aid developers in their own plans, but it will be of great service to all those interested in the development of the city of Gibraltar. A first teaser of the potential of the 'Mapping our Past' project has now been developed and it should be online shortly.

1055 Mapping our Past will also serve as the keystone product that will enable us to pursue the setting up of a Historical Environments Record. A Historical Environments Record is the cornerstone of any Heritage Department. It aims to provide as complete as possible a catalogue of all the heritage assets in a given place. We are currently studying the feasibility of undertaking this together with other Government Departments.

1060 Mr Speaker, our collaboration with the University of Cambridge on the study of human remains from the ex-St. Bernard's Hospital continues for another year. Our research in 2015 has shown that the cemetery located here dates *not* to the 16th through to the 18th century, as was originally assumed, but it actually dates to the mid-15th century – which is in itself significant, as the time when the Moorish occupation of Gibraltar ceased. In effect we might well be looking at  
1065 the last Islamic or the first Christian cemetery on the Rock.

Well-preserved human remains from this period are rare and, beyond the University of Cambridge, this discovery has already interested scholars from Germany, Spain and the United States of America.

1070 Mr Speaker, we expect great things from these collaborations and it serves to understand the international research potential that Gibraltar holds. We may be small but our vibrant history, and especially its study, enthral experts everywhere.

1075 Mr Speaker, on the cultural front no-one can deny how, in the past five years since we came into office, events, facilities and cultural development has moved forward in leaps and bounds. We have been able to export our culture as well as expose our cultural identity with high-quality exhibits and events.

We hosted, in Gibraltar, the Little Constellation Network project – 'The Voices of the Sirens'. The final exhibition brought 14 international artists to exhibit in Gibraltar. A Voices of the Sirens book which is about the project held in Gibraltar has been launched in London and in Milan.

1080 We participated in the Tourism and Culture Expo in Tangier to promote cultural links with Morocco. Gibraltar Cultural Services has been instrumental in producing and organising a Retrospective Exhibition with Royal Academicians: Anne Desmet, Ann Christopher and Barbara Rae. This is part of our ongoing cultural development initiatives and this is the first time that any Royal Academician has exhibited in Gibraltar.

1085 We have supported the participation of local artists in competitions abroad, such as the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition and backed a Gibraltarian artist doing a residency with the Island Games in Jersey in 2015.

Further, we are currently in the process of organising the Gibraltar-Berlin Art Residency which will start this month. This will see a Gibraltarian artist taking up a residency in Berlin, and a Berlin artist doing a residency in Gibraltar.

1090 As we promised in our 2011 manifesto we opened the Mario Finlayson National Art Gallery in June 2015 and the Gibraltar Exhibition for Modern Art Gallery (GEMA) in November 2015, giving Gibraltar its first two permanent National Art Galleries. A total of 34 artworks have been purchased during the current year.

1095 The Annual Drama Festival held in March 2016 was the biggest to date, with 14 entries and over a whole week of theatre.

Support was given to the GNDO to organise the European Show Dance Championships in October as part of our event-led tourism initiative. Over 700 dancers participated and the show was seen by over one million viewers online via website and live stream throughout the four days of competition.

1100 The Gibraltar Cultural Services who run many of our cultural events together with, and at times on behalf of, the Ministry of Culture are not only involved in organising and/or monitoring events they are also involved in managing all the facilities in which these events take place. We have seen the vast improvements to the John Mackintosh Hall and works to the courtyard to extend the cafeteria and the installation of a new gutter system have been completed. This  
1105 included all new appliances for the cafeteria.

Repairs were made to the external walls and ceiling of the private High School area. The entire John Mackintosh Hall Theatre roof, which had not been maintained for years, has now been replaced. The theatre now boasts a number of new technical upgrades, from new PA systems to lighting equipment.

1110 The refurbishment of the theatre with new flooring and seats is currently taking place and should be complete by the end of summer. The library at the Mackintosh Hall has seen 400 new

books added to the collection. The library catalogue is now digital and can be accessed online. This went live on 3rd March 2016. Book titles, authors, and subjects can be searched remotely; members can also reserve books or extend the lending period online.

1115 Additional furniture for the children's section has also been purchased. The Central Hall and the Retreat Centre have also seen much-needed refurbishment carried out.

GCS have also taken on the responsibility of maintaining many premises held by cultural, sporting, charitable associations and clubs. This never used to happen with the previous administration – in fact what we had when we came into Government in 2011 was a claim from a tenant for damages caused by water penetration from windows and the roof. This made us survey all the premises owned by the Government and during the last five years many of these premises have now been upgraded and therefore this should now avoid any future claims.

1120 I would like to thank the staff at GCS especially Mrs Angela Bula who is very proactive in maintaining the Mackintosh Hall, Central Hall and all the other venues I have mentioned.

1125 Mr Speaker, after hearing the Hon. Member, Mr Clinton, reference the GMF: it is disappointing to hear from him that the GSD Opposition will not be accepting the invitation of the Government as organisers to attend the Music Festival this year. He will nonetheless receive an invitation, as will all Members of the House. We encourage them to attend, as they have every other year. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) Indeed, I am surprised that he is  
1130 so entirely calling into question the judgement of his colleagues who have previously attended.

**A Member:** And boogied with all of us!

**A Member:** I agree!

1135

**Hon. S E Linares:** You see, Mr Speaker, it is completely wrong to think that attending the Music Festival is a jolly of any sort for us on this side of the House. Perhaps he could ask Mr Feetham, Mr Hammond, Mr Reyes and Mr Bossino, to name but a few of the Members of the Opposition who accepted the invitation and attended.

1140 For Ministers, the Music Festival gives us, the Government, more work to do. We spend the time there dealing with problems which are ... You might laugh, but it is true and if you want you can come to the actual festival and follow me all day, and 24 hours and 48 hours that I am organising it. Follow me, and you will realise, and then you will laugh.

1145 I spend a couple of days organising and not having a grand time. The other Ministers spend their time attending to those who are attending from outside Gibraltar, in particular the gaming and financial services companies that bring their international boards to Gibraltar for the weekend and who want to have their many issues dealt with and resolved on the day – this actually happens. It is called networking, problem-solving and engaging with the people who bring business to Gibraltar. We also spend considerable time with MPs and MEPs, briefing them  
1150 on all aspects of the Gibraltar issue, and building relationships.

The GMF is many positive things for many people, Mr Speaker, but for the Ministers, it is hard work; he can ask those of his colleagues who have been there with us. It is also true that, for the Opposition, it is none of these things. They come and enjoy themselves and they do not solve problems for the Festival, and they do not solve problem for the gaming and financial services' company boards, and they do not meet the international boards of these companies  
1155 either. For the Opposition, Mr Speaker, it is really a jolly. It is. (*Interjections*) It is really not work for them k at all.

1160 Mr Speaker, he would certainly be right to say that attendance at the GMF is a jolly for the Opposition. It is, in fact, one of the examples of the way that they "stick the nose in the trough" – (*Laughter, interjections and banging on desks*) as his former colleague in the executive of the GSD, Mr Bossino, used to describe the cocktail parties to which they always were so keen to be invited.



1165 In addition, Mr Speaker, I have to tell him that the approach to innovation he has shown suggests that, under the GSD Government in which he would be the Minister for Public Finances, there would be *no* Music Festival.

**A Member:** Within budget!

1170 **Hon. S E Linares:** There will be no Music Festival: what a pity, because it is not a festival which costs £2.25 million, as he suggested (*Interjection*) I will give him the explanation: it is one of those that also produces much more than that amount, almost for the whole of Gibraltar.

Let us look at the wider picture, which Mr Clinton's myopic view does not reveal, because the Hon. Member, Mr Clinton, is a classic case of knowing what the cost of things are, but not the value. I was told that by the previous Chief Minister when we used to criticise the Theatre Royal.  
1175 The only thing there is that there was loads of costs and no value, because we ended up in a hole. (**Several Members:** Hear, hear!) (*Interjections and banging on desks*)

First of all, the worldwide exposure (*Laughter and interjections*) that the Festival buys us is almost incalculable. (*Interjection*) Okay, I will give you the formula ... We appear in massive numbers of media, and the name and the image of Gibraltar goes further and wider as a result  
1180 of the GMF – some other festivals, we establish and support – than we could afford to pay for in advertising terms. Surely he recognises that at least. Just that benefit is probably worth close to millions in advertising. I will give him an example later.

From the data obtained from the GMF, we can see that many businesses in our economy benefit massively from this event. The attendance was 14,000 last year. Indeed, last year was  
1185 our first two-day festival. We carried 65 acts on four stages.

Online survey data indicated that all Gibraltar hotels were sold out for three days – that is unusual and is of course hugely important. That is not a week when we usually fill up the hotels. All flights were sold over the weekend; again, not something that has happened before. From the tickets sales we can see that 85% attended both days. 95% rated the event as 'very good' and 'excellent'.  
1190

As a result, let's see what the Music Festival does for Gibraltar. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) There were 4,500 tickets sold overseas. So, that means that we received at least that number of visitors in Gibraltar for those events, and that does not include the people from outside who have tickets purchased for them by those inside Gibraltar, like the members of the boards or the directors of gaming companies who I referred to before and who hold their international board meetings in Gibraltar for that weekend. That is a huge bonus in numbers of people visiting and spending in Gibraltar.  
1195

According to UK music reports of 2014, the overseas music tourist spends an average of £750 per event, with hotel accommodation, food and drink, merchandise and other costs thrown in.  
1200 This means that during the GMF weekend, people from overseas spent approximately £3.4 million, although this is obviously not direct income for the Government.

Spending inside the GMF facilities has also been analysed and I want the Hon. Member to see the benefit of this information that I have been provided by the organisers. The catering industry benefitted to the tune of £154,000; local charities and clubs by £32,000. In addition, of course,  
1205 Calpe House had an additional £23,270 from the Government's donation of the amount left over from the bracelets, bringing the total to £55,000 of benefit for charities. Arts and crafts and merchandise: £26,000. One thousand people were employed on the two days of the GMF and benefitted and also enjoyed the event. This is what spending on these events means to the whole of the economy.

1210 Events-led tourism works and, as we get more and more data, we can see that this policy is beneficial. We work closely with the Tourist Board to market events abroad. An extra benefit is that people from overseas attend the event, and most of the time come to Gibraltar on other occasions.

1215 In addition, Mr Speaker, the fact is that, even more directly we will see how we directly  
recover the £2.25 million. You see, Mr Speaker, we do things with a business plan and our  
business plan sets out how we are going to not just recover these costs, but also cover future  
costs directly, and not just indirectly. The cost to the taxpayer this year is the high point of costs  
in an eight-year plan which will see us take the Festival into profit in the seventh year, from  
which we start to repay the expenditure to the taxpayer. It would not be easy to predict the  
1220 period of repayment, but it is not unfair to imagine payment in the following two to three years.

That is long-term planning, Mr Speaker, which will see us recover not just the £2.25 million,  
but all of the monies invested by the taxpayer so far in respect of this event – but this is direct  
recovery.

1225 For all the reasons I have already talked about, it is clear that indirect recovery starts almost  
immediately, given the huge numbers of visitors and their average expenditure which I have  
already mentioned. So, Mr Speaker, instead of just looking at the headline-grabbing cost, which  
he has done today, the House will want to understand the massive wider benefits to Gibraltar  
and the way in which we have designed the Festival in order to ensure that it pays for itself in  
the context of the business plan we have established.

1230 Indeed, with potential sponsorship and other deals in the offing, it could be that the Festival  
pays for itself sooner and adds even greater benefit to Gibraltar plc. This is the case with the  
best chess open tournament in the world that attracted 450 participants; the Gibraltar Darts  
Trophy, where over 100 participants, officials, attended and over 200 spectators to see the  
tournament.

1235 The same can be said with: the World Music Festival; the International Song Festival; the  
Backgammon Festival; the Gibraltar Snooker Championship; the Ten Pin Bowling Tournament;  
the Literary Festival; the Jazz Festival and many more. But the value is not only that people come  
to enjoy these events, the real value is that most, if not all, of these events are televised,  
streamed, or programmes are transmitted worldwide. This exposes many different facets of  
1240 Gibraltar.

I will give the House an example of the value of these events in relation to coverage these  
have attracted. The Snooker Championship was televised live on Eurosport 1 and Eurosport 2 for  
22 hours of broadcast and had a total reach of 13.6 million viewers throughout the whole of  
Europe. The Chess Festival was reported on the main Indian and Chinese channels, as well as  
1245 CCTV sport channels, as well as on South African Channel. The exposure for Gibraltar, since they  
reported by going to different locations ... And it is important that the programmes that they do,  
they do go to different locations in Gibraltar and they film the whole of the Rock. They are  
actually doing a tourist programme for us. It is incalculable, the value that has. The exposure to  
Gibraltar plc is worth more than placing an advert on those channels, which could cost  
1250 approximately £20,000 for a 30-second slot.

Mr Speaker, I now move on to sport. The Bayside Sports Complex construction and  
refurbishment project was completed and inaugurated in March 2016.

It consisted of a number of areas:

1255 (1) The construction of an extension of the Boat House Centre to provide a dedicated single-  
storey facility for stay and play activities for those with additional needs. The facility was  
designed with the needs of specific users in mind and followed a period of consultation with  
some of the agencies who would eventually utilise the facility. The extension incorporates soft  
wall finishes, adaptive lighting and dedicated sanitary facilities incorporating proper equipment.  
The facility was handed over in time to be used for the 2015 Summer Sports Stay and Play  
1260 Programme during which it was considered a welcome addition to the general facilities at the  
Bayside Sports Complex. Since then, the extension has been used regularly by the Guardian  
Angel Foundation. I am glad to say that they have also used it, and they are using it currently  
very successfully this year as well.

1265 (2) The relocation of the existing lecture rooms and the cafeteria in the administration  
building: these works have seen the relocation of the existing ground floor lecture rooms to the

first floor together with the additional boardroom. On the ground floor a basic shell was prepared for use as a cafeteria, which was subsequently fitted out by the end user. The lecture rooms/boardroom were completed by the end of summer 2015 and since then have been used by the GSLA and other entities.

1270 (3) The provision of eight, first floor rooms in the hockey stands by inserting mezzanines in  
the excessive headroom of the existing shower and sanitary facilities to make the best use of the  
structure: the works included the erection of an external steel walkway/stairs, and fitted with a  
lift for all areas to be accessible. These works have required phased working as only two sanitary  
1275 facilities could be handed over to the contractor at any one given time. The Government  
welcomes that some association headquarters that were housed at the Retrenchment Block,  
well away from the place where they operate, have now moved to these excellent facilities.  
They can now administer their sports where they actually practice the sport.

(4) The construction of an Annex to the original Victoria Stadium main building as well as  
some minor conversions to this. The Annex comprises three floors in which one can find – and I  
1280 will not go through the whole list, but they are things like: players' first aid room; doping control  
facility; medic centre; TV studio; spectator bar facilities; VIP lounge; TV camera platform;  
additional needs viewing platform and many other things.

I welcome everyone to go and see it whenever they wish to. I am sure the staff there will  
allow you to go and see it.

1285 The Annex, now known as the Elizabeth II Sports Annex, was originally conceived as a means  
of bringing the stadium's facilities up to a standard to permit specific categories of international  
football matches to be played. In order to achieve this, the UEFA Stadium Infrastructure  
Regulations were used as a basis for the design brief. However, it is clear that the facility can be  
used by any other sporting organisation requiring access to such facilities. The building is used  
1290 several times a week by recreational groups and was recently the organisational centre for the  
EuroHockey Challenge III women's competition, which was hosted locally. In addition, both the  
basketball and rugby fraternities will make use of the facility when hosting international events  
in the very near future.

In all areas of works, use has been made of LED lighting, much of which is controlled by  
1295 occupancy sensors, which will result in a more efficient use of energy. Apart from this, the  
Annex's main water and heating system incorporates heat pumps to minimise energy waste. All  
areas of the works have been designed with open access for all, and to facilitate this lifts have  
been installed.

Mr Speaker, this is the important aspect of these four projects: these four projects were  
1300 costed before it was commissioned to the tune of £4.4 million and I am glad to report to this  
House – although I have overspent on one, I have underspent on the other, or at least in this  
case – that the overall cost of the four projects has been approximately £2.9 million. So,  
basically, £1.5 million below what was originally costed.

The main contractor has been Sharrock Shand Ltd and the project manager, contract  
1305 administration and clerk of works' roles being provided by the Government's Technical Services  
Department.

Mr Speaker, I now move on to the swimming pool. The major refurbishment works to the  
renamed 'Accessibility Swimming Pool' started 26th May 2015 and were completed early into  
the summer season the same year.

1310 The project included the installation of a photovoltaic system and dehumidifier that replaced  
the previous system which was getting close to a complete shut down and was beyond  
economical repair. It had not received any sort of maintenance since the facilities were  
inaugurated. The new system has now: improved air quality and water temperature  
maintenance that were bordering on inadequate; provided savings in terms of water, electricity  
1315 and fuel; conformed to HMGoG environmental policies regarding carbon footprints, etc.;  
reduced overall maintenance costs.

In addition, the interior of the facility underwent a much need refurbishment that included: essential attention to poolside issues; refurbishing of changing rooms; reconfiguration of easy access/family changing rooms ; replacement of flooring; general facelift.

1320 Mr Speaker, the overall cost of the project was £510,000. However, a third of the costs regarding the air treatment system will be recovered through the European Regional Development Fund: approximately £120,000 – long live the European Union! The project was approved by the EU Secretariat with all applications submitted accordingly. The savings we are currently making will pay for this project within three to four years.

1325 This project is in addition to the one undertaken in the 25 metre pool the previous year and thus has resulted in both pools receiving attention during this administration's terms in office.

1330 Mr Speaker, as far as energy saving is concerned, the combined projects have resulted in the production of 368.54 MWh of renewable energy as of 10th May 2016. In addition, the fact that there is no longer a need for diesel fuel as the main source of fuel has also resulted in a reduction of consumption from 36,189 litres of fuel – which in money value was £26,118.11 for the financial year 2013-14 – to 4,000 litres – which is £3572.50 in the financial year 2014-15 – to 1,000 litres – which is £596 in this financial year, 2015/2016. Basically, from paying £26,118 every year in fuel, we are now paying £595 and that £595 is a necessity because it is a backup, just in case the photovoltaic system stops.

1335 Phase two of the Bathing Pavilion project was completed and the facility opened to the general public during the summer months. The issues regarding the main pools were solved with the main contractors absorbing the costs, and this resulted in an improved swimming environment with positive feedback received from end users.

1340 Improvements have now been made in terms of accessibility to the sea and pools and the general public will now be able to enjoy a fantastic facility year on year.

1345 HM Government of Gibraltar, via the GSLA, have been involved with the following events, both at a logistical and financial level: the UEFA Champions League, which we had yesterday and for a couple of days; the FIBA Europe Under 18 C Division Championships Men and Women; UEFA Futsal Champions Cup Preliminary Rounds; World Snooker; Netball U17; PDC Darts; Tradewise Gibraltar Chess, which we support and sponsor; the 6th International Junior Chess Festival; the first International Backgammon Tournament – and that seems to be going very, very successfully this year and we are oversubscribed to that one; the Gibraltar Squash Open; the Gibraltar International Regatta; the Ten Pin Bowling; International Dog Shows – which I am sure the Hon. Member is usually involved in and likes and gets a lot of help from the GSLA; Harley Davidson's Rally; Classic Vehicle Rally; and the Gibraltar Amateur Boxing Association bout.

1350 Mr Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Gibraltar Amateur Boxing Association for hosting a very successful boxing bout locally and for their win at this event.

1355 In addition, the GSLA offers logistical support and facilities for local sports associations to complete their league and development programmes throughout the year as well as assisting schools in fulfilling their PE curriculum, both at the Bayside Sports Centre and at the GSLA swimming pool complex.

1360 Mr Speaker, the Summer Sports and Leisure Programme 2015 proved to be a great success again. The programme ran for six weeks and recorded almost 9,000 attendances throughout its different elements. The Sports Train offered sporting and leadership activities every weekday morning for seven-year-olds to 14-year-olds. The Children's Corner offered appropriate sport and recreational activities three days per week for five-year-olds and six-year-olds.

1365 The Stay and Play programme offered sport, physical, arts and leisure activities for children with special needs, five days per week. The new purpose-built facility added to the already excellent quality of delivery and made the surroundings much more comfortable for both children and leaders.

The GSLA also worked in partnership with the sports associations – 25 in total – to provide a wide range of sports coaching courses and taster sessions for children and young people. Other

1370 positive leisure providers, including HM Government's Department of Culture and Heritage, the RGP, St John Ambulance and ChildLine, also offered the children and young people a diverse range of activities including arts and crafts.

Mr Speaker, the Government, via the Gibraltar Sports Advisory Council (GSAC), administered by the GSLA, has continued to support local athletes and teams when travelling abroad to official international competitions.

1375 The GSLA advocates the fact that it is not purely enough to be a member of the international governing bodies, but local entities need to be active within them via participation at events and competitions or by participation at congresses or annual general meetings.

1380 The sports development initiatives have been supported with a view to increasing the qualifications, knowledge base and experiences of local coaches and administrators, whilst some funding has also been provided to associations in order for them to effect vital improvements and adjustments to their facilities.

1385 In addition, some individuals have presented cases for financial support under the 'elite athlete' categories and have been supported, after applications were considered on a case by case basis. Total funding provided under sports grants – and that includes all of them – is £507,979.83.

1390 GSLA/GSAC have also been working on revamping and updating the criteria booklet that regulates the funding highlighted above. Particular emphasis has been made on minimum requirements in terms of background checks and police vetting with regard to those who work with young children. A GSLA representative sits on the Child Protection Committee and lessons learned, as well as policies implemented in this forum, are being adapted to the sporting association and how they are regulated.

1395 Mr Speaker, the Island Games: as the Ministry for Sports and the GSLA have worked alongside the Gibraltar Island Games Association (GIGA) and supported them in submitting Gibraltar's successful application to host the NatWest Island Games in 2019, an opportunity presented itself after the initial host Island pulled out of organising the Games and GIGA, together with HMGoG, decided to submit the application. Since then an organising committee has been formed, subsequent contracts have been signed, and the wheels are firmly set in motion.

1400 GIGA and the GSLA have already hosted two visits from the International Island Games Association (IIGA). The initial familiarisation visit was followed by the IIGA Executive Committee's decision to hold their Annual General Meeting in Gibraltar and subsequently they visited the proposed venues. The feedback received was very positive and the Executive Committee was particularly impressed with how advanced the local associations are with their respective preparations at this early stage and how enthusiastic Gibraltar in general felt about the Games.

1405 The GSLA and GIGA have already met all the associations who have submitted their initial requirements and work has started in earnest regarding this aspect of the Games. Both the CEO of the GSLA and the chairperson of GIGA returned from Gotland where the 2017 Island Games will be held and gave presentations to all islands on the Gibraltar Games. They are both confident and satisfied that our facilities and preparation are well scheduled and that we will be able to produce an excellent Games.

1410 Mr Speaker, all in all, this last financial year 2015-16, in relation to the portfolios that I am responsible for, the Government has been able to fulfil manifesto commitments. It has also achieved many goals in many of the areas that I have highlighted. For this, I would like to thank all the staff of the Ministries, companies, authorities and offices that I am responsible for; especially, I would like to thank the staff at the City Hall who go beyond the call of duty and, at times, against all odds.

1420 Mr Speaker, the organisation, attendance at different events and running Ministries such as Sport, Culture, Heritage and Youth is not just a nine to five job but one which heart and soul must be devoted to. The management and staff have succeeded with flying colours.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. *(Banging on desks)*

1425 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, in order to allow those who supported the arrival in Gibraltar of Lord Monckton some years ago, and to demonstrate how right the Hon. the Minister for the Environment has always been about climate change, can I invite the House now to recess for a short comfort break and for people to see how badly it is raining in summer. I propose that we should be back very quickly indeed, in five to 10 minutes.

1430 **Mr Speaker:** We will have a short recess and then I will call upon the Hon. Mr Edwin Reyes and then the Hon. Marlene Hassan, whereupon the House will adjourn until tomorrow for the Chief Minister to exercise his right to reply. I think it is going to be tomorrow at about midday.

1435 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, yes that is my intention. I was going to give Hon. Members an indication of that.

**Mr Speaker:** The Chief Minister will make his right to reply, then we return at about 3.30 p.m. in the afternoon when we go into committee to consider the estimates in detail. I think Hon. Members are now in a position to make their plans for today and tomorrow.

1440 **Hon. Chief Minister:** And for committee, if only Mr Clinton and Mr Bossano want to turn up, I think that is perfectly all right with all of us, Mr Speaker. *(Laughter)*

*The House recessed at 12.01 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 12.13 p.m.*

**Appropriation Bill 2016 –  
For Second Reading –  
Debate continued**

1445 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Edwin Reyes.

**Hon. E J Reyes:** Mr Speaker, sir, this happens to be the ninth consecutive year I address this House in what is commonly known as the Budget Session and in all these nine addresses, on whatever side of the House I may be sat in any particular year, my contributions under the section dedicated to sports and leisure have always been the most enjoyable at a personal level.

1450 As a firm believer in unity, where possible, for the benefit of Gibraltar's greater interest I am glad to see that Government continues with the long existing policy to assist all local sporting bodies to overcome any foreign government's politically inspired attempts to block our membership of international sporting bodies. In the past we have rejoiced together in respect of landmark achievements and this year we have yet another memorable achievement to rejoice about – namely the acceptance of the Gibraltar Football Association as a full member of FIFA. *(Banging on desks)*

1455 The policy of assisting Sporting Associations will certainly continue to receive the Opposition's wholehearted support and I sincerely wish other sporting associations, such as Rugby and even the long standing claim by the local branch of the IOC, amongst others, all the very best in their continuing battles to obtain their respective international memberships which are rightfully and legally theirs.

1460 The GSD Opposition wishes the Gibraltar Football Association all the very best in building its own stadium, especially now that they are moving to an alternative site, rather than Europa Point. I am particularly pleased to hear of the latest developments which indicate that the GFA will receive substantial funding which covers almost the entirety of the costs of building a new

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1470 UEFA, hopefully Category 3 stadium. However, irrespective of what the GFA does or does not  
build, the GSD believes there is a need for more and better football facilities to be provided for  
the benefit of our community at large and across all age groups. I believe Members of this House  
should work together in order to provide our football fraternity with adequate facilities in which  
1475 to train and from where a serious programme of youth development may take place. It breaks  
my heart to see so many football teams having to go into Spain in order to be able to train and  
prepare for local and international matches. Indeed, more facilities are very much needed if we  
are to continue to aspire to progressing to the second rounds and beyond of the qualification  
stages in respect of European Champions League and the Europa League in order to proudly  
face, at home, legendary teams such as the Scottish champions, Celtic, and the likes from other  
countries.

Another summer sports season is already upon us, Mr Speaker, but as yet the Gibraltar  
Cricket Association still has no permanent home of its own and has to make do by playing its  
competitions in the limited and inadequate facilities available at Europa Point.

1480 I urge Government to be ever mindful that a level playing field must be provided for all  
sporting associations, more so as it is a commitment of theirs, and I quote:

to monitor the demand for additional facilities for all sports to ensure that existing facilities are developed further  
in line with our community's needs.

The Government is committed through its election promises to provide renewed facilities for  
the playing, teaching and development of both cricket and rugby at the Europa Point area but,  
unfortunately, these have still not materialised despite having been first promised through their  
1485 2011 elections list of commitments.

Gibraltar is now set to host the Small Island Games once again in 2019 and we look forward  
to the announcements of refurbishments and/or construction of new facilities which will serve  
our local community beyond these 2019 games.

1490 Mr Speaker, although I am a firm believer that individual Sports Governing Bodies should be  
allowed to manage their own affairs with no political interference, I once again urge the Minister  
for Sports, in his capacity especially as Chairman of the Sports and Leisure Authority, to take a  
particular interest to ensure that publicly owned facilities are used in a fair manner for the  
benefit of all sports lovers. There is both a duty and moral obligation for the Sports Authority to  
ensure that, where desired by a club or individual citizen membership in their relevant local  
1495 sports governing body is open to all in an equal and fair manner. I offer myself to sit down and  
discuss with the Minister for Sports possible avenues which may be looked into in order to set  
up a special independent body tasked with matters pertaining to and requiring arbitration  
especially related to local sporting issues. Some disputes have been dragging on for a bit too  
long now and I am hopeful that by working together with all affected parties, solutions can and  
1500 should be found.

Mr Speaker, through the collective celebration of social events, participating Gibraltarians  
contribute towards reinforcing our identity, culture and history as a people and a community.  
Both the performing and fine arts fraternities always prove themselves to be very proactive  
within their own specialised areas and I take this opportunity to congratulate all the groups and  
1505 individuals who have done Gibraltar extremely proud through their international participations  
and, especially, those numerous cases where we have obtained top grades. It is always a  
personal and collective pleasure to be able to say how proud we are of the international  
achievements of our fellow Gibraltarians.

1510 During their last term in office, Government purchased both the Queen's Cinema and  
Queen's Hotel sites for the development of a theatre and related activities. However, there are  
somewhat mixed feelings among the local community as to how these sites will be developed  
and at what cost. Given that Government has pledged to make the old Queen's Cinema complex

a venue for touring productions, I sincerely hope that the development of these sites will be real value for money and that our local culture, in the widest sense of the words, is enhanced.

1515 If Government can afford to set aside in the Estimates £1,500,000, which actually resulted last year in a gross expenditure of £3,600,000 or net of £2.25 million to subsidise a mega-concert, then surely our local performers and entertainers are entitled to ask for a theatre which is fit for purpose so that they too may offer live entertainment and in turn develop their own skills. *(Banging on desks)*

1520 Mr Speaker, in respect of repairs and refurbishments of Government rental homes, what has happened over the last few years is that an ever increasing number of home refurbishments are contracted out to private companies without going through any type of clear, transparent and accountable tender processes. Unfortunately feedback from tenants who have had remedial works carried out in their homes indicate that, at times, the quality of the finished product  
1525 leaves somewhat to be desired.

The Ombudsman, in his latest Annual Report, says that his Office continues to face difficulties when seeking information related to works which have been passed by the Housing Authority on to the Gibraltar General Construction Company Ltd (GGCC), which is the entity tasked with repairs to rental housing stock.

1530 When the works will be undertaken or, indeed, who will carry out the works, is not information available to the Ombudsman directly from GGCC. Sadly the Ombudsman had to add in his report:

It is very often a very tedious and difficult exercise to obtain information via the Housing Manager who in turn finds it difficult to obtain information or indeed even replies from GGCC. The above situation prevents the Ombudsman from providing a good, efficient service to those who have lodged a complaint, which in general are in respect of delays as to when works will be undertaken.

Mr Speaker, these difficulties which the Ombudsman highlights in his report coincide with the feedback I receive when I meet tenants during clinics held with them. Indeed I have even  
1535 had cases where tenants claim to be holding back payment of rents as a sign of protest in respect of the length of time they have been waiting for essential repairs to be carried out in their rental home.

Mr Speaker, the Opposition agrees with Government that action needed to be taken in order to ensure that all tenants are up to date with any rents due. Indeed, I go further and congratulate the Minister for Housing for having commenced a programme of agreements which will ensure all debtors are up to date with their rents within a given period of time.  
1540 However, it is also equally just that tenants should have remedial works carried out to an acceptable standard and within a reasonable period of time. If the Ombudsman finds it difficult to get answers to his questions, one can only imagine what it is like for a tenant trying to obtain any answers directly by themselves.  
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Mr Speaker, both the Ombudsman and Action for Housing have expressed concern at the manner in which housing allocations are currently being made. Government had a 2011 Manifesto commitment to provide a home to everyone on the Housing Waiting List, and on the pre-list, as at 9th December 2011, all of that will happen before the next general election. The  
1550 pledge was to eliminate the then existing waiting list and pre-list. Unfortunately this target was not met by the time the 2015 elections came along and from the statistics available in January 2016 there were still 413 applicants awaiting the allocation of a home, despite their names having been on the waiting lists prior to 9th December 2011.

The Government's website that gives a breakdown with statistics by Department was last  
1555 updated in February with figures in respect of Housing matters, and that is with figures as at the end of January 2016. This information is therefore now six months old and I would welcome an update of statistics which I know and hope Mr Speaker would also appreciate, as it curtails Questions which I otherwise have to pose at Question Times and these questions are purely of a statistical nature.



1560 Based on the January 2016 figures, there were 1,566 applicants on the waiting list with an additional 520 on the pre-list, giving us a grand total of 2,086 applicants.

As at January 2016, the Minister for Housing informed this House that she expected 21 rental homes to be returned to the Housing Authority upon completion of all co-ownership homes. Given the extremely small number of rental homes which will become available for applicants who cannot afford to purchase co-ownership homes, I recommend that Government takes a serious look at constructing new rental homes, not just for senior citizens, worthy as these are, but we must address the housing needs of all current applicants.

1570 The Opposition had suggested prior to the last general elections that rents in respect of rental homes should be means-tested. Therefore, we note and welcome the views expressed by the Ombudsman that there should be periodical reviews of rental charges. Not everyone is able to obtain a mortgage and therefore purchase their own home through the co-ownership scheme. However, there are many who do and yet they opt out of purchasing knowing that their monthly rents are a pittance when compared to the level of their personal wages.

1575 Mr Speaker, many new home owners have expressed to me their sense of unfairness as the only way in which they could obtain a home in keeping with their family requirements was through co-ownership and this in turn brings with it new financial burdens. Their claim of unfairness is that not only do they now have a mortgage to pay of say around £200 a month for an average two-bedroom home, but they additionally have to pay community fees or service charges which at current rates are even greater than what a Government rental tenant pays in rent per month. Indeed Mr Speaker, there are more and more people asking why should the taxpayer have to subsidise rental homes, given that the annual cost of expenditure for upkeep of these homes is greater than the sum received from rents due.

1580 Mr Speaker, I would be grateful if Government were able to explain why despite the recently announced increases in House Rents, of which no notice of intention to introduce increases was given at election time, the estimated revenue under this heading for 2016-17 is now estimated to be, from a net of £2.9 million, to about £300,000 only, therefore less than the forecast for last year. Likewise, Mr Speaker, given that six rental housing estates have been recently mortgaged by Government, can these tenants be enlightened as to whether they remain Government tenants or are their new landlords now a company or some other entity?

1590 Mr Speaker, there are now many Gibraltarians who have very recently moved into their new co-ownership homes. I have had an opportunity to see some of these homes myself and I am happy to report that many aspects of these new constructions are very welcome by their new owners. However, there are some aspects which I would like to bring to Government's attention in the hope that the relevant Minister will be able to look into this further.

1595 Mr Speaker, numerous purchasers at Beach View Terraces have brought to my attention their concerns in respect of the quality and reliability of the lifts installed. A recurring example of why the new lifts already give cause for concern is the unfortunate frequency with which they seem to break down. I sincerely hope that this will be looked into with some priority and that, likewise, proper monitoring during the installation of lifts at the existing rental estates which are currently having refurbishments will be monitored as and when the lifts are being installed.

1600 Before I conclude, Mr Speaker, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister to spare some time and look into the new problems which have arisen within some homes in the estates where refurbishments are presently being undertaken. I have received information from a few tenants, some with photographic evidence, showing that as a result of the cladding and installation of new roofs, they are now suffering from water ingress – an issue which had never occurred in the many years they have been living in the same home. In wishing the Minister all the best and hoping that refurbishment works are completed on time as per the schedules she has already provided through answers to questions I have posed in this House, I appeal to her that new remedial works such as those I have just given examples of are also completed within the same time span as all major works are due to be finished.

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1615 Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister has already in the past given a public indication that he will carry out a reshuffle of ministerial responsibilities at some stage after this year's Budget Session. In anticipation of this I wish to restate – as I have done on previous occasions – to all my colleagues currently sitting on the Government benches, in particular those Ministers whom I will have the honour and privilege to shadow, that I remain always ready to work collegiately within this House when embarking upon reasonable, responsible and, above all, affordable initiatives so that together we improve the quality of life of this precious community of ours. I sincerely hope Government will accept this genuine offer of mine in the spirit it is intended. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)

1620 Mr Speaker, I know I repeat myself as in previous years but I cannot sit down without thanking you, the Clerk and all the staff here behind the scenes because although the general public rightly think that parliamentary work is the sessions that they are able to follow through the media, a lot of work does happen on days when there is no official sitting and especially I know the opposition can be a bit of, as they say, a pain in the neck when we come here and keep  
1625 on asking the Clerk for information and so on!

So Mr Speaker I thank them all and especially I thank the Clerk for the lovely birthday cakes he shared with all of us yesterday. (*Laughter and banging on desks*)

**Several Members:** Hear, hear!

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**Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Marlene Hassan Nahon.

**Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

1635 Mr Speaker, before I commence my address, my young son has told me that I must mention today here in Parliament last night's event at our very own Victoria Stadium, where Gibraltar's champions, Lincoln managed to win their first round game and are now drawn against Celtic from Scotland. (**Members:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*) This is a great achievement and we will now be able to host Scottish fans in what I hope will be a great event for Gibraltar.

1640 Mr Speaker, it seems that since the referendum result, Gibraltar and Scotland seem to be making huge strides together!

1645 Mr Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise to deliver my first budget speech as an Independent Member of Parliament. When I was first sworn in as a Member of this House, I felt not only a strong sense of privilege, but also one of immense responsibility in keeping with this Chamber's long and close association with the history of democracy in Gibraltar. And it is with the confidence of the mandate that was given to me at the last general election that I stand here today, determined as ever to meet these responsibilities as a minority Member, as indeed a number of independent parliamentarians have done before me. It is their passionate commitment to the people of Gibraltar, Mr Speaker, that I hope to reflect in myself. And it is in this spirit that I would like to state my first response to the Government's Budget.

1650 This budget and its reflection Mr Speaker, follows a bruising Brexit campaign and result. The conviction to remain part of the EU unified people of Gibraltar across political party lines, religions and economic sectors – across all traditional divides. Now that the result is known, it is important for Gibraltarians to focus their attention on its growth engine – the economy. It is a time to work with the Government of Gibraltar in its quest to find the best solutions for a post-Brexit Gibraltar. Until the UK itself comes into solid ground though, as to what are the effects and new stipulations of a Brexit within the EU, any pretence that there is a clear policy to offer with regards to Gibraltar's place going forward would be purely speculative.

1660 While talks and ideas for a redefining of the UK is underway, I wish to add that I have no doubt, Mr Speaker, that Gibraltar will continue to thrive and reinvent itself as it has always done, in order to move forward with the times and continue to be a successful economy for generations to come. We have seen this so often in our history and this latest challenge, Mr Speaker, should be no different.

Mr Speaker, I am aware that there will be some overlaps with what has been discussed this week. However, I am hopeful that my unique position will offer a different insight.

1665 I would like to start with the people of Gibraltar, for whom the budget has a direct impact on their daily lives. I am glad to report that my invitation to Gibraltarians to provide me with their issues and queries was heeded by many concerned citizens. As I have committed, I will start with some of the main concerns and comments. I will in due course be sending a letter to the Chief Minister in which I will articulate their suggestions and concerns.

1670 Mr Speaker, over the years, Gibraltar has seen a spate of lifts being installed in many estates around the Rock. I am pleased for those in our community who are now finding mobility easier as a result of these lifts being installed. However, I have been made aware that such facility has not yet been extended to those living in many areas of Gibraltar.

1675 I was recently approached by residents of Sandpits House, where many are struggling up and down flights of steps while they wait for their promise of a lift to be materialised. As people living in these estates get older, Mr Speaker, and their mobility is reduced, so is their independence as a result of this delay, something which is greatly affecting their quality of life. I therefore call on Government Mr Speaker, to honour their manifesto commitments and complete the installation of lifts in estates around Gibraltar as soon as possible and within the 1680 2016-17 financial year.

With regard to the cemetery and its upkeep, Mr Speaker, it has also been brought to my attention that people are aggrieved for the condition in which their beloved friends and relatives are lying to rest. People would like to know whether there is a structured maintenance programme in the cemetery, and although I do note the hon. Member, Minister John Cortes 1685 saying yesterday that there was a plan and structure in hand, I am sorry to say that up until now, the cemetery has not been dealt with by way of priority. Mr Speaker, if we really are the caring society that we purport to be, we need to be reflecting this by restoring dignity to our cemetery, a place of peace, solace and comfort, as a matter of urgency.

Mr Speaker, I will, if I may, now touch upon the topic of tax arrears, which is another issue 1690 that is distressing many in our community, some of those who are in arrears, others whose employers are not paying their taxes for them, and a few who are waiting for their rebates.

On 7th June, arrears stood at £28.71 million or 4.86% of Government estimated revenue for 2016-17. Since first being published for 2011, the tax arrears for individuals have remained fairly static. The breakdown only provides for four categories – namely, individuals, self-employed, 1695 companies, and PAYE – and does not afford an understanding of the aged debtors. In order to gain a sense of how realistic the expectation would be for Government to be able to collect the tax arrears, I call on the Government to release a schedule of aged debtors.

From my dealings with many employees, I have a particular concern with PAYE, which is withholding tax on income payments to employees. As I understand, PAYE means that the tax 1700 was deducted by the employer from its employee's salary, but not paid over to Government. This means that on 31st March, 51.72% of tax arrears were attributable to companies. Is there a relation between the company tax arrears and PAYE arrears? As I understand it, the collection of PAYE is a function that Government transfers to companies, so companies act as their agents. So if the companies do not pay over the PAYE, they have effectively taken money due to 1705 Government. What sanctions does Government impose on these companies in these instances?

And Mr Speaker, during last week's Chief Minister's Questions and Answers, the hon. Member, the Chief Minister, alerted this House to the fact that £30 million is owed in refunds to the taxpayer. Various people over the last few months had approached me with a view to voicing their need to receive these rebates, something I believed would be forthcoming in the 1710 not-too-distant future, or that it would not be an issue, Mr Speaker.

However, after noting that Government have only budgeted £10 million for the current financial year to allocate for rebates, I have to ask, on what basis can this be justified? Last year £7 million was budgeted for rebate but even then, £560,000 was held back from being returned. 'Is this the new and improved rebate mechanism put in place?', I ask.

1715 There is no excuse for the delay in refunding people's monies, Mr Speaker, especially when the sums are extortionate and in effect being borrowed by Government but not included as part of its Public Debt – a Public Debt figure which would have broken the legal limit approved by this House had it been accounted for. **(Several Members: Hear, hear.)** *(Banging on desks)* *(Interjections)* Mr Speaker, I ask Government, would not rebating at this rate inevitably  
1720 compound the rebate amount while people await their money indefinitely?

Mr Speaker, this delay seems unfair on the public and unfair on the staff at the Income Tax Office whose will to solve the problem is stifled due to Government budgetary decisions. And having said that, Mr Speaker, I hope that there is or will be a process in place to ensure that people who are in arrears on their rents do not get a refund, should such be due to them.

1725 On the subject of rent Mr Speaker, I am pleased to note the increase, however small it may be, on rental charges, but hope that Government has thought through a mechanism to ensure how those in arrears will be complying with such a rise as well as paying those outstanding arrears. I also hope that Government intends to have annual or regular increases on rent, to catch up for the last few decades. At this point, I think it is important to recognise the work of  
1730 the Hon. the Minister for Housing for working tirelessly and firmly to decrease Housing arrears, and putting this mechanism into place, something that needed to be done desperately, but a thankless task that is not easy or popular to see through. *(Banging on desks)*

On the subject of arrears, Mr Speaker, we have not even begun to discuss arrears in electricity, which actually stand higher than rental arrears, at over £6.6 million. I call on  
1735 Government to explain to this House how it plans to retrieve this other large arrears sum.

As highlighted, Mr Speaker, the general feedback I have been receiving, the feedback that matters, the feedback from our community is, in part, the result of my shout-out through my press release of 6th June stating that it is important that Gibraltarians from all walks of life be involved in, and are able to participate in, the compilation of the Budget.

1740 An interactive budget is more than just cameras and extra parliamentary sessions, Mr Speaker. What is important is that all Gibraltarians should understand the budgetary process and for their voices to be heard. No contribution should ever be trivialised or rejected out of hand. It is with this intent that I am pursuing my call that this, and all future Budgets, honour the trilogy of evaluation – namely transparency, accountability and probity.

1745 In addition, the Budget should be acknowledged as a living document. It should be a process rather than an event. Following its delivery, we should not need to wait 12 months for another. I am proposing and calling for the introduction of a biennial Budget review – a six-month review, if you will. The United Nations (UN) adopts such a budgetary process – its Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts. This budgetary process allows the UN to implement, monitor,  
1750 evaluate and provide feedback on the budget.

Similarly, in the UK, we see each year what is known as an 'Autumn Statement' some time in November or December, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer provides an update on the Government's plans for the economy based on the latest forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility. In a world where the only constant is change, we no longer have the luxury to wait 12 months, Mr Speaker. The budgetary process needs to be as resilient as we Gibraltarians are.

Mr Speaker, while on the subject of planning and interaction, this House will recall the Chief Minister's announcement, on 4th May 2015, of the creation of an Economic Advisory Council, named 'Gibraltar 2025 – In Partnership', to assist the Government in:

its development of a ten-year strategic economic plan in partnership with the private sector and unions.

1760 More than a year has passed since this announcement, so I would ask the Chief Minister to give us an update on the progress of this Council.

Mr Speaker, let me offer my reflection and observation on Gibraltar's tax base. According to the Estimates Book, Import Duties and Income Tax are estimated at £150 million apiece, or

1765 collectively at 50.78% of total revenue. Company Tax is estimated at £105 million, and inclusive of Customs Duty and Income Tax it equates to £405 million or 68.55% of total revenue. Should one add Group Practice Medical Scheme of £25 million, these four taxes equate to 77.35% of total revenue. There are 110 revenue items, so three or 1.82% of the revenue items accounts for 77.35% of total revenue.

1770 It is quite evident, Mr Speaker, that Gibraltar has a very narrow tax base. Though this ought to be of concern to all Gibraltarians, more concerning is that very little is, for instance, known about the nature and extent of the revenue collected by means of Import Duties – the tax on imports.

1775 The most recent import statistics are for 2014, as contained in the Abstract of Statistics 2014, which was released in December 2015. However, there are a few concerns with this dataset. For one, and I quote:

The source data for 2014 is incomplete and will be revised once all the declarations have been processed by HM Customs.

The 2015 dataset is, as yet, not available. The partial dataset then also excludes petroleum products. Why is that?

1780 Then, there are no statistics as to the products being imported, nor of the aggregate Import Duties that they attract. So imports tend to be a closed book, despite, as mentioned by the Chief Minister, a substantial growth in Customs staff. I call on the Government to release more detailed import and export statistics; as do I require clarification as to how, for instance, Government is able to budget for Import Duties when these datasets are not complete.

1785 I must say however, Mr Speaker, it was refreshing to note the Government's removal of Import Duty on nappies, tampons and sanitary towels. While I, and I think I speak for all women in Gibraltar between the ages of 12 and 50, congratulate the Government on their decision to eliminate Import Duty on these essential items, lament the fact that this was necessary in the first place, it is however, comforting to see Mr Speaker, that these vital products are no longer considered luxury items and that they are no longer bunched up in the same category as hair extensions! (*Banging on desks*)

1790 And Mr Speaker, now to Government Companies – wholly owned Government Companies, are normally confined to page X in the published Approved Government of Gibraltar Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for a given financial year. I call on Government to publish and include additional pages containing the names of all companies in which the Government has an interest, inclusive of minority shareholding, and also for all Commissions and Agencies which it has established. If past practice is anything to go by, then the Estimates Book, will contain the standard diagram of the 'Government Companies (wholly owned)'.

1800 In essence it consists of two holding companies, namely Gibraltar Investment (Holdings) Ltd and Gibraltar International Bank Ltd. The expenditure item 'Contribution to Government-owned companies' accounts for 4.99% of total expenditure, or £25 million. So what do we know about these companies? Where are the revenue and expenditure reflected? Would one not expect it to form part of the Budget? (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) (*Banging on desks*)

1805 Then, do these companies submit annual returns? And if so, to whom? And are these annual returns available for public scrutiny? Do we know if these companies have boards? If so, who are the members of these boards, and what is their remuneration to serve in such capacity?

Also, to who are these board members and companies accountable to, and what is the sanction if they do not fulfil their mandate? These are but some of the questions which I call on Government to clarify and answer in the name of transparency, accountability and probity.

1810 I would have expected, Mr Speaker, that since the Government is allocating expenditure, which is essentially the redirection of revenue to these companies, namely in the figure of £25million, as announced for this year, that these companies should have accountability to this House.

1815 While having just dealt with Government Companies – wholly owned Government Companies, of which this House has at the very best, very little, if any financial information – in the Chief Minister’s address a couple of days ago, yet another has been created, via Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd, a newly incorporated subsidiary of the Gibraltar Development Corporation.

This latest development – the £300 million new institutional investment – raises many more questions, and a matter which I ask the Government to provide more details on to this House.

1820 Mr Speaker, I would like to clarify exactly what this is, so the man on the street understands in no uncertain terms that when the Hon. the Chief Minister refers to institutional investment of £300 million, what he is in fact referring to, is a long-term loan – additional Government borrowing of £300 million, secured against six Government estates where ordinary people live. In short, a massive mortgage.

1825 So the question is: on what terms has Government entered into an agreement of this magnitude and is it right to commit future generations to such an agreement? I call on the Government to inform this House how the structure works, inclusive of the source of finance for repayments. In addition, I would also ask Government to explain to this House and Gibraltarians what would happen in the event of the Government defaulting on any of its commitments. Because, Mr Speaker, in the trying times facing Gibraltar, people want to and need to feel safe about our nation’s financial arrangements and decisions, so more disclosure on this latest agreement would be very welcome.

1830 I also ask Government to explain to this House and to the people of Gibraltar how it could enter into an agreement without consultation of this House – an agreement that binds Gibraltar for such a long period of time. A period of time that would conceivably extend well beyond this administration’s term of office. Although the Government might profess this to be a better strategy than ‘selling off these prized assets’, Mr Speaker, what it is doing is to borrow against these prized assets, while acting as facilitator employing a wholly owned Government Company, which finances are not reported to, or receiving the scrutiny of this House.

1835 This is why I ask for clarification as to why money needs to be raised, particularly in light of the recurring Budget surpluses that the Government have been recording, and the glowing testimonial given on the performance of the economy.

1840 Mr Speaker, people are asking me why is an amount as large as £300 million required, an amount equivalent to 50.78% of estimated revenue for 2016-17? Is the intention to use the full amount and offset the net public debt at £345 million?

1845 Why is this amount needed, particularly when the Chief Minister, in his address stated that, and I quote, ‘We have the liquidity necessary to deal with the issues that do confront us and we have the liquidity necessary to deal with the issues that could confront us’? I await the Chief Minister’s answers to all these questions.

1850 Mr Speaker, on a personal note, and to recap what I have been doing in the last seven months since being elected to Parliament, I would like to remind you and the House of a few of my endeavours. In Education, I have highlighted concerns by teachers and parents ranging from the practical to logistical, questioning manifesto commitments, which have now turned into consultation exercises like school lunches, to matters of health, safety and security in the new schools that we eagerly await to be built.

1855 Likewise, in Health, I have brought to the House people’s concerns with the current system at the Primary Care Centre and St Bernard’s Hospital, as well as those of doctors, for example, in connection to the upcoming implementation of the General Medical Council, a dynamic and ambitious move, but one that sadly I feel has not been properly thought through and could have negative repercussions for the Health Authority if we do not get it absolutely right.

1860 In general, Mr Speaker, I have spent much of my time talking to, but most importantly listening to, constituents and bringing their causes and concerns to Government, this House and responsible bodies. And on that note, I would like take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Health for collaborating with me when he has been able to do so, for having always given me the time to present to him the cases that I have come across when shadowing the Health portfolio,

1865 and listening to the constituents who have approached me needing action to be taken. To this day, the hon. Member, the Minister for Health has always been willing to help me to help others and I thank him for this. *(Banging on desks)*

I would love to see more cross-party collaboration for the good of the average Gibraltarian who needs to be heard and helped.

1870 In order to, in future, facilitate a more conducive and productive budget deliberation, I call on the Government to next year release the full copy of the Draft Government of Gibraltar Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 2017-18 to this House, including the information it provides in the copy which is only subsequently published for public consumption.

1875 In accordance with my commitment to foster a culture of an open Budget, I have written to a number of international institutions which champion this cause. I believe that much could be gained from Gibraltar being an active participant in these initiatives.

I call on the Government to adopt a biennial Budget review, making it a living document, increasing transparency and including all Government Companies (wholly owned), joint ventures, agencies and commissions in a single Government Budget, presented to this House.

1880 By way of conclusion Mr Speaker, I want to reiterate, that I still have a responsibility to the electorate to form part of an effective Opposition that is so essential to the democratic process. Mr Speaker, I want to work in partnership with the majority party in Opposition to hold the Government to account, but for me, it is also important to hold the majority Opposition to account when I feel that their sense of perspective may be distorted. **(Several Members: Hear, hear!)** *(Banging on desks)*

1885 And Mr Speaker, I would like to remind the people of Gibraltar that I am here as their voice in Parliament, to represent them and bring their causes and concerns to this House, and to try and help the vulnerable and those in need in any way I can.

1890 I would also thank the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Minister, the Clerk of the House and his wonderful staff and in particular you, Mr Speaker, for helping me ease into my first year as a parliamentarian. And despite the upheavals between myself and some of my former colleagues, I would like to reassure them that they, as well as all other Members of the House, shall remain on my Christmas card list! *(Laughter and banging on desks)*

1895 And if there are any doubts to my loyalties, Mr Speaker, then I would like to make it clear that my loyalties today, as they have always been, are to democracy, to this House, and to the people of Gibraltar. *(Banging on desks)*

1900 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Well, Mr Speaker, after hearing a veteran give his contribution and hearing a maiden give her contribution which sounded very much like a veteran's contribution, I now propose that we adjourn till tomorrow at midday, when I will exercise my right to reply to everybody else.

**Mr Speaker:** The House will now adjourn till tomorrow at 12 noon.

*The House adjourned at 12.57 p.m.*