



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

MORNING SESSION: 10.35 a.m. – 12.32 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 29th March 2017

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 10.35 a.m.

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

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

Suspension of Standing Order 7(1) to proceed with Government Statements

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Wednesday, 29th March 2017.

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Chief Minister that he intends to move now the suspension of Standing Orders in order to make two Government statements this morning. I should also inform Members that he will do the same this afternoon in order to make an additional third Statement this afternoon.

The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I beg to move, under Standing Order 7(3), to suspend Standing Order 7(1) in order to proceed with a Government Statement.

Mr Speaker: I now put the question that the Standing Orders should be suspended as moved by the Hon. the Chief Minister. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Westminster terrorist attack – Statement by the Chief Minister

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, the terrorist attack last week in London was a strike on the Mother of all Parliaments. It was an attack on British democracy and as such it was also an attack on this Parliament. We take our powers from an Order in Council that originates at Westminster, we are part of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association which is based at Westminster, and of course we are British and any attack on Britain is therefore also an attack on us.

In this instance in particular, Mr Speaker, I can tell Hon. Members that, along with the Deputy Chief Minister and the Attorney General, I was in exactly the area of the attack the very day before. We had been in the Lords and in the Commons lobbying for Gibraltar, meeting friends of Gibraltar and engaging with Members of both Houses of Parliament in support of Gibraltar's cause, and on our television screens we saw many regular visitors and friends of Gibraltar affected by this attack.

Mr Speaker, it is the Westminster Parliament that represents the modern concept of the rule of law. It is that Parliament which has, for longer than any other, been the embodiment of freedom and respect, and we in this Parliament will want to stand shoulder to shoulder with our parliamentary colleagues at Westminster in the Commons and the Lords. We express our

solidarity with all MPs and all those who work in the Parliament in London. In particular, we express our condolences to all those who lost loved ones in this attack. Four innocent dead in the heart of Whitehall is an atrocious tally of evil that all in this House will want to roundly condemn.

Specific mention must be made of the loss of life of police officer PC Keith Palmer. On days like last Wednesday we are reminded that we are indebted to all police officers for the dangerous and often thankless work that they do to keep us safe. The death of a police officer in these circumstances serves only to emphasise the risks that they take every day.

It is also worth noting the heroic efforts to revive PC Palmer of former Gibraltar ADC Tobias Ellwood, now a Minister in the Foreign Office, and he has now been elevated to the Privy Council.

Mr Speaker: Does any other hon. Member wish to speak?

The Hon. the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, thank you very much.

The Hon. the Chief Minister speaks on behalf of the Opposition in what he has said to this House in his Statement a few moments ago.

All that I would do on behalf of Her Majesty's Opposition is to offer our condolences to the families of the victims and also all those who were injured, in particular the four individuals who unfortunately and tragically lost their lives in this terrorist attack: Aysha Frade a mother of two; Kurt Cochran, a US tourist; Leslie Rhodes from South London; and of course, as the Hon. the Chief Minister has pointed out, Police Constable Keith Palmer. All of them left their homes and their families that morning expecting to return to their homes and their families later on that day and unfortunately did not do so, and on behalf of her Majesty's Opposition I wish to extend my condolences to the families of the victims.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Ms Marlene Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, every year on 5th November the United Kingdom comes together to essentially celebrate a failed terrorist attempt to destroy the House of Lords. This atrocity that was not has become a part of folklore, but it draws attention to the fact that even over 400 years ago the heart of British democracy was already a target for those who wanted to subvert the values that the building represents.

Last week the edifice came under attack again and while the methods may be different, the times more modern and the building itself changed, the intentions were still the same: to threaten our freedoms and our political structures and to inspire fear into the hearts of the world's citizens. And while Guy Fawkes and his co-conspirators were defeated, so was this latest perpetrator, showing that these values are as robust and as deep rooted as the buildings that protect them.

In this case, unfortunately, there were some fatalities and we, as a House that also protects the democracy it represents, must pay tribute to their memory. These victims themselves characterise the kind of modern pluralism that extremist actions fail to undermine. A female British teacher of Spanish origin, a male American tourist, an elderly English man – who, incredibly, used to wash the windows of that very bastion of democracy himself, Winston Churchill – and, of course, an unarmed police officer who was tragically killed while discharging his duties. As unnecessary and cruel as these deaths are, Mr Speaker, they are nonetheless a reminder to us all of the value and dignity of a life bereft of hatred, violence and evil. I express my deepest and sincerest condolences to the families of these individuals with the assurance that their memories will never fade in our appreciation of the freedoms we enjoy.

But this is a time of heroes, Mr Speaker: of heroes like PC Keith Palmer, guarding the front line of these freedoms; of heroes like MP Tobias Ellwood, selflessly helping wounded, despite the uncertainty of the event's immediate aftermath; of heroes like all those policemen who

stand outside high-profile targets and promise us that our lives will not be disrupted; and of
85 heroes like the security and emergency services that protect our communities and keep us safe.
And while the pain we all feel will eventually fade, history will remember these heroes and the
sacrifices they have made in the name of everything we hold dear.

But there is perhaps no bigger hero than the City of London itself. This glorious metropolis
has weathered many storms, but wounded and cornered it has refused to be beaten. It has risen
90 from the ashes of the Blitz, it has risen from the rubble of Bishopsgate, it has risen from the
mangled steel of the July bombings, and every time it has risen it has defied hatred as a diverse
and cosmopolitan city of dreams that will not bow to violence but instead will stand up for the
democratic values that we represent.

The very morning after the attack Parliament convened in that same building, showing that
95 the wheels of democracy were far from having been derailed. People took to the streets to
reclaim their own freedoms and show that the City's heart was still beating, that democracy
cannot and will not be defeated and that we will not give in to the fear of hatred. London and its
people should be commended for this response, for sending a clear unified message to those
that aim to divide.

100 But this response, Mr Speaker, must be a responsible one. The world cannot afford for these
actions to create tensions between its people. This event and the person behind it must be
rightly condemned, but we must not blame race or religion or immigration, or revile an entire
culture because of the actions of one. Violence and hate cannot be allowed to divide people and
to make us cast doubts and suspicions over others. To do so would be to threaten the values
105 that many have died protecting, and the unity of our condemnation must be matched by the
unity in our humanity. These were the actions of one deranged and evil individual, a man
resentful of our freedoms, representing nothing but a violent anger that has no place in any
spirituality, and it is precisely by being united and by remaining loyal to our common humanity
that this futile menace will be defeated.

110 This has been an awful episode in human history, Mr Speaker, but I am confident that these
stories of heroism and this stoic refusal to give in to fear will once again show us for the
remarkably lucid and compassionate species we are.

Thank you.

115 **Mr Speaker:** Does any other hon. Member wish to associate themselves with these
sentiments? I will now ask the House to –

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker.

120 **Mr Speaker:** Chief Minister.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I will now call on the House to observe a minute's silence in
honour of the City of London and the Members of Parliament at Westminster.

A minute's silence was observed.

Tribute to Maurice Xiberras

125 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, all Members of the House will have been
saddened to hear of the death of Mr Maurice Xiberras.

Mr Xiberras sat on benches on both sides of this House. As a leading light in the integrationist
movement of the late 1960s, Maurice became a Member of the House of Assembly as a
Government Minister, with Sir Bob Peliza as Chief Minister from 1969 to 1972 and with Peter

130 Isola as a fellow Minister. Those were challenging times, Mr Speaker. The Frontier was closed and logistical arrangements akin to a Berlin Airlift had to be put in place.

135 After the election of 1972, Mr Xiberras remained in this House as a Member of Opposition, with Sir Joshua re-elected as Chief Minister. In that year, of course, Mr Speaker, both you and Mr Bossano were elected with Mr Xiberras as Members of this House. Interestingly, Mr Speaker, I note that today in this House there are two people who sat with Mr Xiberras in this place and two people who stood with Mr Xiberras in elections to this place. You and Mr Bossano sat here with him between 1972 and 1979, and Mr Bossano and Mr Feetham stood with him in 1972 and 2003 respectively. I do note that in the gallery we see a former Member of this House, Mr Caruana, who also sat here with Mr Xiberras.

140 Mr Speaker, the 10 years in which Maurice was a Member of this House were, as ever for Gibraltar, challenging and difficult. The closure of the Frontier by the Dictator General Franco was perhaps the most difficult moment, but no less difficult was the return of democracy to Spain and the UK's attempts to engage us in sovereignty discussions with Spain as a result. For much of that time Maurice was in the heart of the action as a Member of this House and as a Minister or Opposition Member or Leader of the Opposition.

145 A very full biography of Mr Xiberras cannot be given today, but it is worth noting that he was a Member of this House for a decade and that he was known for his eloquence whilst here. I will always remember a phrase he coined in the 2003 General Election, the first one I and the Leader of the Opposition were candidates in. Maurice's turn of phrase then was to say that the election was not about grooming horses. I could see how he had managed to encapsulate contesting theories about what that election could be about in just one phrase. He will have been pleased that neither of the two colts in that election have done badly.

150 I considered Maurice to be a friend, Mr Speaker, who could argue a totally contrary political position but who was nonetheless happy to have dinner and share anecdotes and tales of political battles past in a convivial and jovial spirit.

155 Last week, on hearing of his unexpected death, I spoke to his son David to express the condolences of the Government and of the people of Gibraltar. Today, I record the thanks of this House for Maurice's work in it and his contribution to it.

160 Mr Speaker, the angry young man is with us no more, but his powerful words in debate, his anger at injustice, his passion for Gibraltar and his contribution to this House will live forever in the record of proceedings of this place. (*Banging on desks*)

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

165 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, much has been said about Maurice Xiberras the politician, and he was indeed one of the great political figures of his time: a founder member of the IWBP; a member of the Constitutional Conference that negotiated for Gibraltar the 1969 Constitution with its linchpin the preamble to the Constitution; he was de facto Deputy Chief Minister in the IWBP Government of the early 1970s and then Leader of the Opposition with the IWBP and then the Democratic Party for British Gibraltar.

170 There is absolutely no doubt that he was, together with Sir Joshua Hassan, Sir Bob Peliza and the Hon. Member opposite, the Father of the House, one of four political figures that dominated politics in the 1970s. To this day his result at the 1976 election, where he stood as an independent following the collapse of the IWBP, coming second in the overall results, continues to be the best result by an independent. Indeed, no independent since has in fact succeeded in being elected to this House.

175 It was a great shame, it has to be said, that despite the fact that he was honoured by this Parliament with the Gibraltar Medallion of Honour, he was not alas honoured by Her Majesty. I do not understand the reason why, Mr Speaker. Perhaps it was that he left Gibraltar for the United Kingdom in 1979, at a time when I am told the DPBG were ahead in the polls, in order to follow his wife and his two young children.

Anyone who has served in politics at the level that Maurice served will understand the unique pressures that politics places on family life. His wife Shirley was raised in Jamaica, unused to living in a small place like Gibraltar and relying on a very small parliamentary salary, and with those unique pressures the strain must have been extremely difficult indeed. When Shirley left Gibraltar he followed, but unfortunately their relationship did not endure and they separated after a few years.

I know that having left Gibraltar in these circumstances left very deep emotional scars, and years later he would tell me that for many years he felt as if he had turned his back on his country. It was one of the reasons why he stood with me in the 2003 election. He wanted, win or lose, to exercise that ghost that had haunted him for many years and he did so by standing again, even though he knew he had little prospect of getting elected. I am glad he did, Mr Speaker, because he became like a father to me, like a mentor, and he followed ... and I indeed followed him – we travelled together in my own political journey since 2003.

He was a man of enormous understanding, honesty, integrity and humility. He was described in the 1970s by his political opponents as ‘an angry young man’. I never knew him as a young man, but I never saw him lose his temper. He was firm when he had to, he would get on his high horse when he felt a matter of principle was at stake and would never compromise on what he felt was fundamental, but I never saw him lose his temper.

If I was to pick a gripe with him it was that his powerful intellect often led him into writing opinion pieces which I described to him, and he agreed, as being the length of a mini thesis. He just had to cover every single point he felt was important, from every conceivable angle. Even after he left frontline politics he would often send me his opinion pieces for a second opinion, always with the title in the email ‘Please slash away’.

It is, of course, his unwavering commitment to retaining British sovereignty over Gibraltar that he is best remembered, a commitment that earned him the nickname at the Foreign Office of the ‘Abominable No Man’. He was deeply suspicious of the Foreign Office but also, it has to be said, of any nationalist tendencies in Gibraltar. He was of course deeply committed to the concept of maintaining our current levels of autonomy whilst strengthening our links with the United Kingdom in the form, in his latter years, of devolved integration – something that he and I both believed might become increasingly relevant in this new chapter that Gibraltar travels in post Brexit.

A few years ago, Mr Speaker, his beloved Mary Ann passed away, unfortunately because of cancer. She had been his partner for many, many years and I knew that he was deeply affected by her loss. I know that he is now in a better place. Maurice, my friend, my mentor, until we meet again may you rest in peace. *(Banging on desks)*

Mr Speaker: Does anyone from the Government ...? The Hon. Mr Bossano.

Minister for Economic Development, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. J J Bossano):
Mr Speaker, I had little contact with Maurice after he left Gibraltar, and therefore what the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition has told us about his subsequent life is something that I think many of us are not familiar with to the level of knowledge that he has told us today.

But of course, I came into politics because of the position that was created in 1964 when the United Nations Committee of 24 for the first time was addressed by Sir Joshua and Peter Isola and came out with a decision which stands today as it stood in 1964 and is the basis of the annual battle we have to fight in the United Nations. And it was because at the time the position that was being taken was that Gibraltar wanted close association – something that did not exist in the terminology of the UN; there were only three options there – there was an option of integration which we were not familiar with but which in fact was brought to the light of day by a journalist who was also working in GBC, Hector Licudi, who was the first one to raise the issue of that option as an alternative. We set up a group to investigate the possibility. We got in touch with the Maltese, to whom it had been in fact offered and Mintoff eventually rejected it, and

from that initial investigation we created the pro-integration movement which was the precursor to the IWBP. The pro-integration movement was the first contact I had with Maurice, other than the fact that we shared years together in the grammar school, and in that first contact it was when we first started gathering some momentum for the concept. Indeed, it was no more than an NGO. Within the AACR we had supporters of integration and there was a debate, which was not a partisan debate – we were looking at the merits of the alternatives that were before us in a situation where what was available under the UN Charter, which was not so-called close association but free association, had a serious weakness from our perspective at the time, which was the fact that the relationship could be ended unilaterally by the UK. Therefore, a free association in decolonisation mode would have allowed the United Kingdom – given the atmosphere that there was then, and continued with even greater force after the death of Franco, that a deal had to be ... The UK resisted. The United Nations called for talks with Spain until Franco died, and that is at the time that I was in Opposition and Maurice was in Opposition and it was at that time that the talks started with Marcelino Oreja in Strasburg. Those talks were the talks that were being held under pressure from the United Kingdom in order to comply with the UN recommendation – because it was not a binding thing – that the process that decolonisation should de facto be one in which Spain would be involved, and as far as Spain was concerned their involvement was only to agree the terms of the recovery of Gibraltar.

In that context the position that Gibraltar found itself in following the referendum was a position that was extremely difficult, because the restrictions were getting worse by the day and it was a baptism of fire for somebody like Maurice and Joe and other people who came in for the first time into Government, straight into Government without having been in opposition before and having had the opportunity to learn the ropes of the game, and having faced a situation where overnight our workforce was disappearing. The one thing that people fear, which I think we are all confident is not going to happen, is a repeat of that situation. If today the workforce that we have in Spain could not come in, the effect on our economy would be even greater than it was in 1968, because at that time many of those workers were here to keep the military base going, but today it is not the military base that is going but the private sector, which is what brings in all the money that we authorise as should be spent in this House through the taxation of that wealth, and we need to understand just how important it is that we keep the private sector going. But in those days when Maurice came in, the importance was that the military base, which was 70% of our economy, and the public services were the big users of foreign labour and that foreign labour had to be sourced, and a deal was done with the Moroccan government using the offices of the British government to bring people here. And Maurice, as Minister for Labour, was faced with a situation that nobody had ever had to face in that job before. It was on the basis of that we were enabled to keep an economy that was flourishing because the level of activity on the military base was kept up. Within the confines of what could be done in four years, I think the transformation that was carried out in Gibraltar by the first IWBP Government, which came in under very difficult circumstances and not only managed to maintain the momentum of the economy but in fact did more – admittedly, some of it with UK development aid, because of the aid programme under the Sustain and Support policy that the UK put in place the moment that we had the threat of being strangled by our neighbour, but nevertheless it produced enormous results and the Government was able to rally everybody around in a situation where people were prepared to work voluntarily. I remember Bob Peliza going to work in the Alameda Gardens to give an example to the rest of doing work free of charge because of areas that were short of labour.

I think that Maurice's contribution in a technical sense, in terms of being able to deliver things with his ability, was a very important part of the success of that Government and I believe that for him it must have been very difficult to leave Gibraltar and leave his involvement in politics.

I was the one who invited him to join the integration movement before it became a political party, and there were other people in that original movement from all walks of life and it was

285 completely non-partisan. It became a political issue when there were two political parties, each one with a different philosophy. The philosophy was what was best for Gibraltar.

I think in this House and in our community it is very important that we limit our differences to legitimate things in which we believe we are advocating what is best for Gibraltar and we do not allow it to deteriorate into something that becomes then a personal issue between us and we then follow a course of action which is driven no longer by putting the interests of our country and our people first. I do not think that ever happened with Maurice. I think Maurice believed with everything that he said that he was doing what was best for Gibraltar, even though some of us might have disagreed with some of his later statements after he left Gibraltar and came back.

295 Certainly we were very close friends, we were very close colleagues and I join the statements that have been made by the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition at the great loss that Gibraltar faces. Some of us are nearer that point in life than others.

Hon. D A Feetham: Perish the thought!

300 **Hon. J J Bossano:** I hope that it will be a long time before speeches have got to be made about me in this House!

Hon. Chief Minister: Hear, hear. (*Banging on desks*)

305 **Mr Speaker:** The Hon. Ms Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, my family name's connection with the late Maurice Xiberras is one that goes back many years, even to a time before either you or the present Father of the House were involved in local politics, difficult as it may be to imagine such a time.

310 He was a contemporary of my father's and as such played an important part in helping Gibraltar take those tottering steps towards being a more functional and self-sufficient democracy. Mr Xiberras's contributions as a member of this early generation of Gibraltar's political development are significant and include his participation in the Constitutional Conference that led to our previous and historic Constitution; serving as a Minister in the IWBP Government and later as Leader of the Opposition, a role that saw him represent Gibraltar's interests in discussions with the United Kingdom and Spain, as well as accompanying my father to Strasbourg for these important meetings.

320 Mr Xiberras played these roles with full conviction to his principles and values and there was never any doubting of his commitment to what he felt was the best for Gibraltar. Of course, Mr Speaker, history naturally shows that Mr Xiberras was also a political rival of my father, but despite this, Sir Joshua always held his adversary in high regard. They disagreed on many matters of local and international concern, disagreements which have continued well beyond my father's sad passing, but as has tended to be the case in local politics, there was a healthy mutual respect in this relationship between Chief Minister and Leader of the Opposition. Indeed, Mr Xiberras wrote my father a very kind letter shortly before his move to the UK, where he expressed both his admiration and his appreciation for the way in which Sir Joshua had always treated him. And while the particular versions of history may have differed, I can confidently assert that my father and his family have always remained similarly appreciative of how Mr Xiberras served the people of Gibraltar.

325 It is unfortunate that Mr Xiberras's direct involvement in local politics was cut short with his passing, for I am convinced that he would have continued to make important contributions to our evolving democracy. It is obvious that his interest in local developments continued even to recent months and his engagement was still today helping to shape the minds of some.

335 As a member of the latest generation of a genealogy of parliamentarians that both my father and Mr Xiberras started almost 50 years ago, I would like to give thanks for his loyal service to

the nation we have all been elected to represent, and of course, would like to extend my condolences and those of my family to all of Mr Xiberras's loved ones. May he rest in peace in the knowledge that Gibraltar is a better place today because of what he did yesterday.

340 Thank you. (*Banging on desks*)

Mr Speaker: I would like to echo those sentiments myself. I am not going to deal with the politics of the situation. My relationship, my close friendship with Maurice was also based on other pillars. We spent six wonderful years teaching together in the grammar school. During that
345 time we were both also involved with the Teachers' Association campaigning for the recognition of teachers, which we did not enjoy then and which they enjoy now.

Another aspect of our close friendship was the fact that for a decade we used to go out to bat opening the innings for Grammarians. We were both very keen cricketers, something that also strengthened our friendship.

350 Politics never divided us. We could rise above that, something that I would commend to all. It is terribly important that we should all realise that there are much more important matters in life that bind us together than political differences.

I join myself, my staff as well, with the sentiments that have been expressed. It was a terrible shock. Only last January Maurice was sitting pretty well where Joe Caruana is now. It was the
355 last time we saw him in the House. (*Banging on desks*)

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, in light of those tributes across the floor and from the Chair, I would now invite the House to observe a minute's silence as a mark of respect for the passing of Mr Maurice Xiberras, a former Member.

A minute's silence was observed.

360 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I think the best way to honour the Westminster Parliament and Maurice Xiberras's memory is to have questions, argument and debate in this House.

Questions for Oral Answer

INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

Q229/2017

**Park and ride –
Manifesto pledge**

Clerk: We now proceed to answers to Oral Questions, and we commence with Question 229. The questioner is the Hon. T N Hammond.

365 **Hon. T N Hammond:** Mr Speaker, does Government have any plans to construct park and ride car parks to the north of the runway as per the 2011 manifesto pledge and then rent all spaces in the Devil's Tower Road car park to residents?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.
370

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, as part of our Government's 2011 manifesto commitment to provide parking north of the runway, Her

Majesty's Government of Gibraltar announced on 16th January 2014 the use of Western Beach car park.

375 Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar also invited tenders in 2014 for the commercial development of the old air terminal site. One of the tender requirements was that any proposals include an element of parking for cars and motorbikes for public use.

In view of the Traffic Plan and its potential options for the car park at Devil's Tower Road, no final decision has been taken on the use of this car park.

Q230/2017
Midtown car park –
Breakdown of space ownership

380 **Clerk:** Question 230, the Hon. T N Hammond.

Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, of the 456 parking spaces sold at the Midtown car park, can the Government say how many different owners there are and if there are any instances of multiple space ownership, provide a breakdown of the number of spaces purchased by a single owner given the number of spaces owned by each owner?
385

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, the information requested is attached in the schedule handed to hon. Members.
390

Answer to Question 230/2017

The records held by Gibraltar Car Parks Ltd show as follows:

Owners with one parking space	259	259
Owners with two parking spaces	62	124
Owners with three parking spaces	5	15
Owners with four parking spaces	3	12
Owners with five parking spaces	2	10
Owners with six parking spaces	3	18
Owners with eight parking spaces	1	8
Owners with ten parking spaces	1	10

Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, I am not sure that the Minister will be able to answer this question but I will ask it anyway. I note on the list that there is a single owner with eight parking spaces and another single owner with 10 parking spaces. Is the Minister aware of whether that is a private individual or a company that owns those spaces?
395

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, yes, they are both companies.

Q231/2017

Black cabs –

Progress re environmentally friendly engines

Clerk: Question 231, the Hon. T N Hammond.

Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, can the Minister say what progress has been made with the
400 introduction of black cabs with environmentally friendly engines?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, the London Taxi
405 Company (LTC) are currently in the process of inaugurating their new facilities in Coventry, UK,
where the new electric TX5 black cab will be manufactured. The left-hand-drive version will not
be available until early 2018 with LTC focusing their initial builds on the right-hand-drive version,
which is their core market.

We expect to be able to procure this version of the traditional London taxi. The left-hand-
410 drive Euro 6 version of the outgoing TX4 version was not manufactured by LTC due to resource
deployment totally being allocated to the preparation of the new facilities and the development
of the right-hand-drive new TX5.

Hon. T N Hammond: I thank the Minister for that response. I just pick up the suggestion that
415 there will be a procurement: is it Government's intention to actually procure the black cabs
themselves, or will they be procured privately?

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, these black cabs were to be procured in partnership with the
420 GTA.

Hon. T N Hammond: And can the Minister describe how that partnership will take shape?
What does it mean 'in partnership with the GTA'? Is Government going to be providing funds for
that?

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, we have not completed our discussions on this with the GTA, so
425 it is still ... When the black cabs are available we will then sit down to discuss the detail. The
issue this has not been done before is because the black cabs, as I said in my initial reply, have
been impossible to procure, not that we did not want to procure them. In fact, we are very keen
on seeing black cabs within Gibraltar reflecting the Britishness of Gibraltar, but unfortunately
430 they were not available and because this has now been thrown ahead until probably late 2018,
the discussion really has not been finalised in that respect.

Hon. T N Hammond: But surely, Mr Speaker, if the plan is to enter or to have a partnership
with the GTA, and bearing in mind this concept was introduced back in the 2011 manifesto, 2018
435 is not so very far away now, and it certainly was the case in 2011. There must have been some
conversations already with the GTA, some agreements in principle as to how this partnership
would work.

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, we work with a GTA Committee whose life is much shorter than
440 ours is within Parliament, and as committees change opinions change, so perhaps what was
discussed very briefly with one committee has evolved with the re-election of other committees.
It is not until we see these cars becoming available, which is what we are waiting for now, that
we will then sit with the committee of the day to discuss the final details on how we proceed
from here on.

445 **Hon. T N Hammond:** Mr Speaker, presumably an initial costing exercise at some point was undertaken in order to come up with this manifesto commitment. Does the Minister have any idea of how much a single black cab of this nature would cost?

450 **Hon. P J Balban:** Mr Speaker, we have no idea what the new electric cabs will cost. The initial investigation was made with the TX4s and we do not know what the new electric vehicles will cost in the future.

455 **Hon. T N Hammond:** And could the Minister, if the calculation has been done for the previous version of the cabs, provide a figure approximately of what one of those cabs would have cost?

460 **Hon. P J Balban:** Mr Speaker, the question the hon. Member is asking is not relevant whatsoever. The question he is asking is what we calculated the price of the vehicles were then; that is totally different to what the price of the electric vehicle will be in the future. Until we have a final price for these electric vehicles it is calculations made in the past, which are totally different today.

465 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I would be grateful if the Minister could indicate whether it is the intention with this partnership with the GTA, whether to provide black cabs, to replace all taxis with black cabs or just a proportion of them. We can obviously go to the internet and find out what the cost of a black cab is to purchase and we can do the maths ourselves if he can tell us how many cabs he thinks will be involved.

470 **Hon. P J Balban:** Mr Speaker, initially what we are looking at is just the 'cabs', in inverted commas, the private hire vehicles which belong to the GTA. That is the only thing that was being looked at. There would be, I would say ... I cannot remember off hand, but I think there are six vehicles which are run by the GTA themselves. That was the initial part of this plan.

Q232/2017
'No idling' signs –
Update

Clerk: Question 232, the Hon. T N Hammond.

475 **Hon. T N Hammond:** Further to Question 196/2016, has the Government had an opportunity to review the recommendations made in its Environmental Action and Management Plan on 'No idling' signs; and does the Government intend to begin a programme of placement of these signs, and if so, where?

480 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

485 **Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban):** Mr Speaker, the Government is reviewing the recommendations on 'No idling' signs as part of a holistic review of the EAMP. The intention is to ensure that recommendations relating to traffic and traffic reduction reflect and complement the measures included in the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan, which is to be published shortly. Additionally, many vehicles now feature no-idling facilities built in.

Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, just bearing in mind originally in the Environmental Action and Management Plan the placement of 'No idling' signs actually had a timeframe associated

490 with it – I do not recall, I believe it was 2015 but I stand to be corrected on that – is the Minister
now saying that actually it may be the case that a decision will be taken on review that that
recommendation will be rejected and that no ‘No idling’ signs will be placed? What is the
purpose of reviewing a recommendation which appeared within the plan to have already been
accepted by the Government?

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Minister for the Environment, Energy, Climate Change and Education (Hon. Dr J E Cortes):

Mr Speaker, the Environmental Action and Management Plan is under constant review and it
is acutely being reviewed at the moment. A lot of the commitments in the plan have been
achieved; others we have to review the time frame for them.

500 I do not think that reviewing something actively should be taken as a negative and I suspect
that when we get the review completed and we have new ... Remember that these timeframes
are aims, they are not ... You do it in advance and you are not absolutely certain that you will be
able to hit them, but certainly the intention is to complete all these requirements and it is very
likely that the ‘No idling’ signs will still be a feature of the plan.

505 **Hon. T N Hammond:** I thank the Minister for his intervention. Could I just ask, because
representations have been made to me, whether the Government would consider at least
accelerating the process for the placement of ‘No idling’ signs particularly at the Frontier, where
it is an obvious place, when there is queueing, for ‘No idling’ signs to be placed, and also in areas
of the Upper Rock where often vehicles are in queues and similarly pollution can become a
510 problem for pedestrians?

Hon. Dr J E Cortes: Mr Speaker, I do not have the plan in front of me. I think it specifically did
refer to the Frontier. That is one clear area where this is an objective, and there are other areas
as well.

515 I think really what we have to do is convince people that idling is bad – bad for the
environment, bad for one’s health – so probably, more than just signs in specific areas, we need
to encourage it in other ways as well. I think the Upper Rock is one area where possibly in some
specific cases these could be used, but I think the Frontier is probably the worst offender.

Q233 and 234/2017

Speed cameras –

Aspect of vehicle captured; locations and operational times

Clerk: Question 233, the Hon. T N Hammond.

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Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, can Government describe the operation of the new speed
cameras, and in particular whether the image they capture is at the front, back or both aspects
of the vehicle?

525 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, I will answer this
question together with Question 234.

530 **Clerk:** Question 234, the Hon. T N Hammond.

Hon. T N Hammond: Can Government say if speed cameras will be in operation at all the
designated sites all of the time?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

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Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar is in the process of commissioning speed cameras at various locations throughout Gibraltar. These locations are Devil's Tower Road, Rosia Road and Europa Advance Road, where four distinct camera positions are available.

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This pilot project will see cameras placed in all of these locations becoming active and will be controlled operationally by the Royal Gibraltar Police.

Depending on the success of this initiative that is aimed at reducing mortality and injury from speeding-related accidents, further locations may be considered in the future.

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As with parking fines, which have recently been increased, the Government has no desire to take citizens' money for speeding or illegal parking. What we all want to achieve, and I am sure I speak for all Members of this House, is that people should not offend, and in that way save lives, make our roads safer and ensure citizens follow the law of the road. These are manifestly not measures designed to raise revenue, as success of the measures will be when the revenue decreases.

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Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, absolutely I am sure everyone in this House supports any initiative which will enhance road safety. I have not brought revenue raising into the equation, so I am not sure why the Minister is at pains to point out that it is not a revenue-raising initiative.

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I would ask him whether he could answer the question as to what aspects of the vehicles the cameras will photograph, which was the first question asked: whether it be front, back, or front and back?

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Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, the reason why I mentioned the latter part in the question was because there were Twitter feeds to this effect suggesting that Government would raise revenue with the cameras. That is not the point of the cameras because, as I said in my reply, as people realise that cameras are functioning and they are being caught on cameras they will then obviously reduce their speeds and not get caught. That will reduce revenue and that will be the end of it.

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As to the direct question the hon. Member is asking, this is something which I do not think is in the interest of actually mentioning the details. This is something which the Royal Gibraltar Police is managing and it is strictly a policing thing. If the hon. Member is adamant to know more, I am happy to discuss this behind the Speaker's Chair if necessary.

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Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, I really cannot understand why it is not in the public interest simply to know whether the speed cameras will be taking images of the front, the back or from both aspects of the vehicle. I would thoroughly recommend, personally, that the speed cameras have the capability to capture images of both aspects of the vehicle. That way, all vehicles, whether they be motorbikes or cars, can be subject to the same restrictions on speed and the same rules and fined accordingly. It would seem inappropriate only to have the capability from the front, because then clearly it would be very difficult to fine mopeds for speeding, and certainly one of the more dangerous aspects of driving on our roads and the people most vulnerable perhaps are speeding moped riders. Often it is very young people who are new to the roads who tend to fall into this trap, and alas and tragically we have seen accidents over the years occurring with young people.

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So I would thoroughly recommend to the Minister that he ensures that the capability of the cameras is such that people can be discouraged from speeding on motorbikes and clearly there is some value to having a front aspect of the vehicle because it then allows the driver of the vehicle to be identified as well. Of course, a vehicle can be insured for multiple drivers so it would be very difficult to fine an individual if the vehicle is only photographed from behind, for

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the very simple reason that it would be very difficult to identify who the driver is. I would just ask the Minister for his views on that.

590 **Hon. P J Balban:** Mr Speaker, we brought to Parliament the Bill to do with speed cameras and the hon. Member I am sure will remember that, regardless of who is driving the vehicle, the onus will be on the registered owner if it cannot be proved otherwise. That was something that was discussed in Parliament and in fact I think we approved unanimously in that respect, so it is a bit odd that the hon. Member should be mentioning that.

595 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I told the Hon. Minister I would come in on the public interest point if it assists the hon. Gentleman and the House.

The cameras are complex and they deal with a number of different aspects of vehicles in different places. What we are saying to the hon. Gentleman is we are happy to have the discussion with him but we do not want to provide a guide as to how the effect of the cameras may be avoided by people. Hence why, instead of having a debate across the floor of the House, we are inviting him to have the information that he is seeking behind the Speaker's Chair. I would have thought that is reasonable. We are not saying we will not give him the information; we just do not think it makes sense to be sharing across the floor of the House that level of information.

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605 The Police may take a different view as to how to deal with issues related to deterrents and they will be the ones on the front line of deciding what is said in terms of any campaign about how the cameras operate etc. We feel that we should not be the ones putting that information out there at this moment in that way and that we are quite happy to have a discussion with him. If it is any consolation, all the things he has said are the things that the Government considered at the time it was procuring the cameras, so he cannot for one moment think that we did not take all of those issues into consideration in the context of procuring, installation and now potential operation of the cameras.

Q235/2017
Government vehicle fleet –
Financial terms re leasing

Clerk: Question 235, the Hon. R M Clinton.

615 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, further to Question 101/2017 can the Government advise if it has now made a decision in respect of the one expression of interest received for the leasing of its vehicle fleet; and if so, what are the financial terms agreed?

620 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning.

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Hon. P J Balban): Mr Speaker, the answer remains as set out to Question 101/2017.

625 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer. Can he give an indication to the House as to when he might expect to make a decision?

Hon. P J Balban: Mr Speaker, the moment we take a decision we will let the hon. Member know when that happens.

630 **Mr Speaker:** May I say to the hon. Member who has asked the question, it is exactly the same question as he asked at the last meeting with the addition of the word 'now'. The answer he has received is the same. I therefore will not allow him to ask another question on the leasing of the Government's vehicle fleet until six months have elapsed.

635 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful for your guidance and you have already expressed this to me. I would, however, ask for some flexibility if I may ask a question about vehicle leasing in future, in a different context.

640 **Mr Speaker:** Should there be a development in the interim period – if there is a development from the Government, if they were to announce the award of the tender – then I will allow the hon. Member to ask about the financial terms agreed, but only if that happens.

COMMERCE

Q236/2017

Post Office and associated services – Supply workers

Clerk: Question 236, the Hon. D A Feetham.

645 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, how many supply workers are currently working within the Post Office and associated services and since when have those individuals been on supply?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Commerce.

650 **Minister for Commerce (Hon. A J Isola):** Yes, Mr Speaker, there are 11 supply workers currently working in the Post Office, most of whom have been on supply since August 2015.

655 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, does the hon. Gentleman have a breakdown of when those individuals started as supply workers? I am interested in particular in any individuals that have been on permanent supply, continuously on supply for a considerable period of time. That is really what I am focusing on and it may assist my saying so to the Hon. Minister in the question that I have asked.

660 **Hon. A J Isola:** Yes, Mr Speaker, there is nobody on permanent supply. There are some that get called more than others do, and the way that the formula works is depending on how many days you have been called over a period of time when you get to an allotment of days, that is when you are eligible to be considered for being permanent. So it is not that I have the details of how many continuous days each of the supply workers have been on supply for, because I do not have that information. What I can tell you is that their start dates are ... As I said, six from 2015, the majority from 2015; one from 2014; two from 2013; one from 2009; and one from 665 2007.

670 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, the information that I have is that the mail man has been on permanent supply, in other words working continuously – and bear in mind, Mr Speaker, that when an individual is on permanent supply they do not have the benefit of holiday leave and also sick leave – but permanent supply for four years; the euro fulfilment individual has been on permanent supply for three years; parcel post continuous supply for two years; and an individual

in the registration room has also been on permanent supply for another two years. Can he confirm those figures?

675 **Hon. A J Isola:** No, Mr Speaker, I cannot confirm those figures because I do not have that data available to me. What I can tell the hon. Member is that I am meeting with the supply workers, in fact, tomorrow – the meeting was set at around about the same time that he will have received the note that I have received – and we will be discussing these things with them at our meeting.

680 **Hon. D A Feetham:** And does the hon. Gentleman agree with me that for somebody to be four years on permanent supply is really extremely unfair on that individual and on that individual's family, bearing in mind, Mr Speaker, that when they were in Opposition and we were in Government we were constantly lambasted for there being individuals on permanent supply? Indeed, it was a manifesto commitment of theirs in 2011 and I do recall that the Hon. the Father of the House also went to the Post Office during the course of the 2011 election and told individuals there that all those who were on permanent supply would be made permanent.

690 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, I think one of the issues that we have is that we do not really understand what the hon. Member means by 'permanent supply'. Our understanding is that people who are on supply could be on supply for a year and get called once a week, twice a week, two days a week. To what extent that is or is not permanent supply I do not know.

From the information I see in this file, I can tell you that none of the people that he is referring to have worked every day on supply for the period. (**Hon. D A Feetham:** They have.) No, they haven't. (**Hon. D A Feetham:** They have.) Not from the information that I have. But as I said to the hon. Member, we will be meeting with the supply workers to go through the issues that he has on the paper that I have and hopefully make some progress to see how these matters can be progressed in order to ensure that the taxpayer receives value for money in their postal service.

700 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Well, Mr Speaker, I am very grateful for that. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the information that I have comes straight from the horse's mouth and these individuals have been working *continuously* – the first individual for four years.

It appears, Mr Speaker, that the heart of the problem – but of course the Hon. the Minister will make his own mind up when he talks to these individuals – is that there are a number of vacancies that exist at the Post Office, and indeed there have been individuals that have been moved out of the Post Office into other areas. For example, the postal sorter retired in 2013; that is a post that has not been filled. Does the Government have any plans in relation to these particular posts that are vacant at the Post Office? Or indeed does the Government have any plans in respect of the individuals that have been moved out of the postal work, therefore creating this space within the postal service that needs to be occupied, in my view – that is my assessment – by these individuals on permanent supply?

715 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, with respect to the length of permanent or normal supply I will wait to meet the horse to understand what it is that they are telling you. (*Laughter*)

In respect of what the vacancies are, what the operational aspects are, I think what we are currently doing is doing a review to better understand exactly what the position is, and once that has been completed I will be in a much better position to discuss with the people themselves, and of course their union, how we see things moving forward.

720 **Mr Speaker:** Next question.

HOUSING AND EQUALITY

Q276/2017

Disability Bill –

Modifications required to public areas and buildings

Clerk: We now move to Question 276. The Hon. L F Llamas.

725 **Hon. L F Llamas:** Mr Speaker, further to Written Question 24/2017, is the Government now able to provide an answer?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and Equality.

730 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, this is the exact same question as Question 24/2017 and accordingly the answer remains the same.

Hon. L F Llamas: Mr Speaker, is the Minister able to disclose whether an assessment has been carried out or is currently being carried out?

735 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, assessments are being carried out, yes.

Mr Speaker: Again, I cannot allow the hon. Member to raise this matter for another six months. Okay?

Q277/2017

**Mortgaged housing estates–
Responsibility for collecting rent arrears**

740 **Clerk:** Question 277, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise with whom the responsibility rests for the collection of housing arrears in future in respect of the six housing estates mortgaged, and how will this be managed?

745 **Clerk:** Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and Equality.

750 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, the responsibility for the collection of rent arrears will continue to be that of the Housing Department and managed in the same way.

755 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. If I may ask, can she confirm that, in terms of the entering into arrears agreements, that the Government will still be pursuing the same policy as they have done in the past and offer exactly the same terms and conditions that they have offered in the past to tenants of these six housing estates prior to the mortgaging?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, yes, in relation to the six estates that are subject to the financing, the same conditions apply because the threshold is that we have to collect arrears of rent regardless. While of course we have a duty in these estates, we also have a duty to the

760 taxpayer in the other estates as well, so we continue to pursue them, to collect them, to chase them as vigorously in relation to all the debtors in the same way.

765 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, if I may ask the Minister: what would happen in the event of significant build-up of arrears in future? Would it be that the Government would have to make good any deficit in rents collected and have to be paid over to Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd, or does that risk in respect of arrears lie with Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd in not receiving rent, or does that risk rest with the Minister for Housing – in which case, does she have an obligation to make good any difference in the collection of rents in the future?

770 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, that of course is a hypothetical question –

Minister for Health, Care and Justice (Hon. N F Costa): Which is not allowed.

775 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** – which is not allowed under Standing Orders, but in any event, for a question of that detail I would need notice of the question. However, what I would say in a general answer to that, to allay Mr Clinton's fears in relation to arrears generally, is that since the arrears collection agreement commenced last January – so it has been going on for over a year – the trend has been that arrears have been decreasing and decreasing significantly every single month of the year except for the month after Christmas, where we had very little
780 increase, but other than that, and they are now down and they are now down to a level below the month before. But the trend is that the figures are going down and not up, Mr Speaker.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for her answer and for and her assurance that arrears will be going down.

785 May I ask – I presume there is and maybe she could confirm – is there actually an agreement with Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd in respect of the collection of rents and would she be willing to provide that to this House?

790 **Hon. Chief Minister (Hon F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman is asking questions he knows the answers to because he was briefed privately in the subject of this matter. That is not a question that arises from this question. It is a question on which he should have given specific notice and he would have got the answer that he was specifically briefed outside of this House because we said that we would consider those arrangements with him and with other Members of the House. The hon. Lady attended a meeting also where she was briefed in respect
795 of those matters.

Q278/2017

Purchase of new affordable homes – Letters to young people to commence process

Clerk: Question 278, the Hon. R M Clinton.

800 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, further to Question 173/2017, can the Government advise if letters have since been sent to young people to start the process of purchasing new affordable homes at Bob Peliza Mews and Hassan Centenary Terraces?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and Equality.

805 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, not yet but it is expected to happen in days. We want to ensure, as far as possible, that the letters go out to all persons interested.

810 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. Can she give the House an indication of how many letters will be sent out – presumably she has the statistics; and if possible – it may be a big ask – a split between both developments?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, I would require notice for details in relation to that question.

815 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I will of course in future table a more detailed question, but could she give the House a ballpark figure as to how many letters she intends to send out? She must have some idea.

820 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, there is a lot going on in Gibraltar and a lot going on in the world for us to be here being asked to give ballpark figures of numbers of letters. If he wants to know how many letters are going to go out, he asks us how many letters are going to go out. If he wants to know how many letters have gone out, he can ask us, once they have gone out, how many letters have gone out. If we give a ballpark figure and it is somehow slightly different to the figure we finally give of letters that have gone out, then we face a question of why we gave a ballpark figure that is different to the figure of actual numbers.

825 This is not a question that arises from have they gone out. Why does the hon. Gentleman think that it is appropriate to ask a supplementary about detail? If it is detail, give the Minister notice of the question and then we will happily come and tell you how many letters we are preparing to go out. It is not a question of not giving the information; it is a question of being asked a question about detail in the context of a question in respect of which it does not arise.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful for the Chief Minister's intervention.

835 Just for the sake of clarity, the question I asked was specifically in respect of the letters and I assumed that the Government would know how many were being prepared. But I will not pursue the point any further and I will do as the Chief Minister suggests and put in a more detailed question. I appreciate this is not a question either.

840 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, thank you, Mr Speaker, for the hon. Gentleman's non-question, but the hon. Gentleman needs to know that these numbers change. There will be more people on the housing waiting list and we want to cast the net as widely as possible, so it is not something we can know today. We can tell him the actual number when it happens and we will be quite happy to tell him – it is just a question of counting the pieces of paper that have gone out to different addresses.

845 **Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon:** Mr Speaker, if I may intervene here, I notice that the statistics online have disappeared on the housing front. Is there any reason for this?

850 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, I am not sure how this arises as a supplementary question but I will answer because it was a question put to me by the Hon. Mr Reyes last month, where I explained that we had noticed some errors in the information that was going up and we were completely reviewing everything that was online because it was more important for me to make sure that if information is available on line, that it is correct and it is accurate and not things that we discovered when we reviewed, which for some reason were being inputted by different people and not being inputted properly. But that was a Parliament question at last month's Parliament, if I recall correctly, Mr Speaker.

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Q288/2017
Government dwellings –
Numbers vacant or derelict

Clerk: We move to Question 288. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: How many Government dwellings are there currently in Gibraltar which are vacant or derelict?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Housing and Equality.

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, we are currently undertaking an in-depth study of all the properties.

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Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, if I may ask, does Government or the Housing Ministry have any policy or any intention to allow for Gibraltarians to take any of these derelict properties on and perhaps beautify them and take them over in the future?

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Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, yes, in the future and in the past, because that is precisely what we have been doing with these properties. What we are doing at the moment, though, is looking at all the properties that we have available in our property portfolio to see how collectively we can move forward in a way that best suits the needs of the Government, and indeed, as the hon. Lady says, the housing needs of people in Gibraltar.

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Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, just one question arising from that question. If the Government is conducting, as the Minister says, an in-depth study into those properties, surely they must know how many dwellings are vacant or derelict.

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Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, again it is a number that fluctuates and it is not for the Department to determine whether a property is derelict or not. We need to consider various things into account and we need to look to see whether a property is vacant and beyond economical repair, in which case we would then assess it to be derelict.

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There have been assessments, which we are reviewing, but the reason I have not provided the figure is because figures are subject to change, subject to this review that we are conducting, because it will all be taken into the global context of the properties that we have. But we will have a very clearer picture in the not-too-distant future because we are very advanced in the study. It is something that we are looking at collectively because we are looking at the parcels of properties that we have available and it may be that it entails moving properties. So it may be that we have more empty properties in the future but with a view to looking at the whole urban renewal and urban regeneration of certain parts of the Upper Town in particular.

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Mr Speaker: Next question.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND THE GSB

Q289 and 290-301/2017

Public finances –

**Public debt; Liquid reserves; GSB shareholding in Gibtelecom;
Inflation and public sector pay increase; Shell LNG Gibraltar Ltd; GSB debentures;
Standard Credit Finance Company Ltd; Management of mortgage funds;
Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd; General Sinking Fund balance**

895 **Clerk:** Question 289, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government please provide the total Gross Debt, Aggregate Debt after application of the sinking fund to Gross Debt, Cash Reserves and Net Debt figures for Public Debt as at 1st February 2017?

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Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development, Telecommunications and the GSB.

Minister for Economic Development, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. J J Bossano):
905 Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Questions 290 to 301.

Clerk: Question 290, the Hon. R M Clinton.

910 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I beg your indulgence if I lose my voice in the next five minutes.

Can the Government please advise the total liquid reserves figure and its constituents, namely Consolidated Fund, Improvement and Development Fund, Government Owned Companies, Deposits, Contingencies and other funds for the following date, being 1st February 2017?

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Clerk: Question 291, the Hon. R M Clinton.

920 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government please advise how total liquid reserves are invested/held, giving details of all savings bank accounts and cash held for the following date, being 1st February 2017?

Clerk: Question 292, the Hon. R M Clinton.

925 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise if the Gibraltar Savings Bank has invited any expressions of interest for all or part of its shareholding in Gibtelecom?

Clerk: Question 293, the Hon. R M Clinton.

930 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise if it is concerned that inflation for the quarter ended 1st January 2017 is 2.5% compared to 1.5% in the previous quarter; and is it still committed to pay increases of 2.75% or inflation, whichever is higher, for the public sector?

Clerk: Question 294, the Hon. R M Clinton.

935 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, given that the Chief Minister in his 2016 Budget speech stated that the Government would have a 49% interest in Shell LNG Gibraltar Ltd, can the Government

advise why it answered Question 87/2017 as follows: 'There are no other joint ventures other than the one mentioned in the question'?

940 **Clerk:** Question 295, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise what are the financial terms and period for new savings products offered to holders of Gibraltar Savings Bank debentures that mature in 2017?

945 **Clerk:** Question 296, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise why was Strand Credit Finance Company Ltd (08489759) allowed to be struck off and dissolved by the UK Registrar of Companies by compulsory strike off for the 1st December 2015, and was any property consequently *bona vacantia*?

Clerk: Question 297, the Hon. R M Clinton.

955 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise why it was felt necessary to incorporate a new Strand Credit Finance Company (10094514) on 31st March 2016 in the United Kingdom and how much did that cost?

Clerk: Question 298, the Hon. R M Clinton.

960 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, can the Government advise how it intends to manage the net £275 million raised by way of mortgaging the six housing estates and who is the responsible officer?

965 **Clerk:** Question 299, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government please identify which Government-owned company is to make payments to Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd by way of housing allowance and what contractual arrangements have been put in place to facilitate this?

970 **Clerk:** Question 300, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise how much has been paid in rents collected to Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd from inception of the new tenancy agreement for the six housing estates to 31st January 2017?

Clerk: Question 301, the Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise the balance on the General Sinking Fund as at 1st February 2017?

Clerk: Answer, the Hon. the Minister for Economic Development, Telecommunications and the GSB.

985 **Minister for Economic Development, Telecommunications and the GSB (Hon. J J Bossano):** Mr Speaker, the position of the Public Debt as at 1st February 2017 continues to be as previously stated, except that the cash reserves were £95.6 million and the net public debt was £357 million.

990 The position as regards the total liquid assets composition, when, where and how these are
invested on a particular date chosen by the Member opposite continues to be as previously
stated.

The GSB has not invited any expression of interest for the shares in Gibtelecom.

995 The January level of the IRP is in line with what I predicted was likely to happen when I
answered the hon. Member's questions in relation to the index increase of last October. All the
indications are that inflation is likely to be higher in the future than it has been in the recent
past. To the question on whether we stand by our commitments, the answer is that we do stand
by our commitments.

I answered Question 87/2017 by providing the information requested in the question.

1000 There are no new saving products being offered to the holders of the GSB debentures that
mature in 2017.

I am informed that Strand Credit Finance Company Ltd was struck off having been dormant
due to an oversight on the part of the UK administration, who met the cost of reincorporating it.

1005 The cash raised by Gibraltar Capital Assets will be managed by the Treasury as part of the
pooled cash reserves of the Government companies and the Housing Allowance payments will
be received by the company from the funds in the pool. The rental income for the period
requested was £1,896,189.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his response. As usual I will
just need a couple of minutes to absorb it.

1010 I seem to note that I do not have an answer to Question 301, the balance in the General
Sinking Fund.

Hon. J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, the answer to that is already contained in the answer that I
have given him.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I asked specifically for the balance of the General Sinking
Fund. I do not recall hearing that number.

1020 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Well, Mr Speaker, if I tell him that there has been no change and he knows
what the balance was before, then the answer is that the balance is what it was before. He
should be able to work that one out for himself.

1025 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, I have never been a great fan of the *Times* cryptic crossword,
but could the Minister indulge me and just give me the number of the balance as at
1st February?

1030 **Hon. J J Bossano:** No, Mr Speaker, I do not see why I should indulge him. I spend every month
telling him that there has been no change and now he cannot remember what was the figure
that I gave him. Well, then, he can look it up.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, coming to the question of Shell LNG Gibraltar Ltd, can the
Minister advise the House whether he considers this to be a Government joint venture? Yes or
no?

1035 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, I do not tell him what questions he should put and he does not
tell me what answers I should give.

Hon. D A Feetham: But you do ask him [Inaudible]

1040 **Hon. J J Bossano:** No, I give him the benefit of my experience, for which he is always grateful, so that he can improve his performance – which he seems to be doing because he has now been promoted by the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition! (*Laughter and banging on desks*) I think he should thank me for that.

1045 If the hon. Member is asking me to express an opinion, then in my opinion since the Savings Bank owns all the shares, it is not a joint venture. A joint venture is something with a third party.

Hon. R M Clinton: Sorry, Mr Speaker, I do not know if the Minister and myself are talking at cross purposes but did I just hear him say ‘because the Savings Bank owns all the shares’ when I was talking about the Shell LNG?

1050 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, the answer that I gave him was in relation to the question that he asked, right? He asked whether there was a joint venture with Shell by a Government company, and the answer is that there is not. The fact that a statement was made at a certain stage in time saying this was going to happen does not mean that things cannot be changed and plans cannot be changed. There is not a Government company in joint venture.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, the reason why I asked this question – and I will put a question to the Minister in a minute – is because I am conscious of the Minister’s desire for precise questions, and he gives precise answers for which I am always grateful. But in raising questions in the House I have to be clear in my own head, in my mind, as to will that question elicit the answer that I am expecting or not, and if the rules of the game change it is very hard for me to ask the right question to elicit the right answer. It is a bit like playing Animal, Vegetable, Mineral: suddenly the vegetable becomes a mineral and the mineral becomes a vegetable and I do not know which is which.

1065 Mr Speaker, I am just a bit concerned as to whether the Minister has been given the correct information, because if you do a search on Shell LNG you will find that it was incorporated not long after the Chief Minister’s speech on 18th August 2016, and of the 2,000 issued shares Credit Finance Limited is the proud owner of 98 shares, which is equivalent to the 49% we were talking about. Credit Finance I believe is still owned by the Gibraltar Development Corporation.

1070 When I start asking about Government joint ventures, is it that the Gibraltar Development Corporation or anything that it owns is not considered a joint venture? Or is he, in his answer, only going to answer in relation to specifically directly owned Government entities and nothing that is related to the GDC?

1075 I am sure the Minister will appreciate the difficulty that causes me in asking the right question. I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify.

Hon. J J Bossano: Well, Mr Speaker, the first thing I want to clarify to the hon. Member is that he keeps on asking questions here on information that he has already obtained which is publicly available, which is something he is not supposed to be doing.

1080 The Credit Finance Company is predominantly owned by the Gibraltar Savings Bank and it is therefore something that is used as an investment vehicle by investing in activities, products or ventures that will promote the economic development of Gibraltar. Therefore, Credit Finance has invested because it comes within the terms of reference of what the Savings Bank does under the amendment which I introduced in the House and which he voted in favour of – but it is not the Government with Government money.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker – and I know I risk straying into extending the question. Does the Minister not accept that Credit Finance – the £30 million ordinary shares are owned by Gibraltar Development Corporation and that the preference shares are owned by the Savings Bank – have no voting rights?

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Hon. J J Bossano: I do not accept what he has said because, as far as I am concerned, the majority shareholder in the company is the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

1095 If the hon. Member's analysis was true, then it would mean that all the things that he has said about the Credit Finance, which has been criticised by him and by his colleagues on innumerable occasions on the basis that Credit Finance was a company that was being used to give money to the Government ... all that would be false if in fact Credit Finance belonged to the Government, because how could the Government be giving money to itself and be criticised for doing it.

1100 There is an element of the original ordinary capital that was created under the GDC and then the bulk of the capital is provided by Credit Finance. So, if Credit Finance provides £400 million out of £430 million, I do not see how the hon. Member opposite argues that it is owned by the owner of the £30 million and not by the owner of the £400 million. So I do not agree with his analysis and it certainly does not stand up against his previous interventions when he has been critical, and so has the Leader of the Opposition, when they have accused the Government of using Credit Finance as a source of finance for Government projects. Well, look, if it belonged to the Government, as the hon. Member is now trying to describe it, then all the previous arguments would be nonsense because then the Government would be using something that belongs to it.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I always find the Minister's logic infallible. Following his own logic and following on from what I believe he has just said, what he is telling the House is that it is the Savings Bank that owns the 49% indirectly, through Credit Finance, in Shell LNG under the terms of its amended objects in which to further the economic development of Gibraltar. Would that be correct?

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Hon. J J Bossano: Yes, and it will earn a very handsome return on that investment.

1120 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, is it not the case that the position is as follows: that what we have is a Government-owned company that is being funded to the tune of £30 million by the taxpayer through the GDC and £400 million through savers' money through the Gibraltar Savings Bank, but the vehicle itself is owned by the Government? It is a Government-owned company – at least partly owned by the Government, even though, as my hon. Friend has said, ordinary shares are owned by the Government through the GDC and the preference shares are owned by the Gibraltar Savings Bank.

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1130 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Well, if the hon. Member is asking me to be true that the Gibraltar Development Corporation owns £30 million of the shares and the Credit Finance Company owns £400 million, then of course it is true because I have just said so myself a few minutes ago and I always tell the truth.

In any event, it is a matter of public knowledge; this is not a secret. But of course if the hon. Member would be happier if the £30 million that is owned by the Government was also owned by Credit Finance, I will take that on board and see if I can make him happy.

1135 **Hon. D A Feetham:** And is it not also the case that the circularity of the argument is as follows? You have a Government-owned company, Credit Finance. It is owned by the Government because the Government owns the ordinary shares. It is also partly owned by the Gibraltar Savings Bank, but it is funded by the taxpayer and by the Gibraltar Savings Bank. The £400 million in Credit Finance which the Gibraltar Savings Bank has invested has gone to another Government-owned company, which is Gibraltar Investment Holdings Ltd, which is then being used in order to pay for expenditure that Gibraltar Investment Holdings Ltd has, including the funding of all the other Gibraltar Government-owned companies, which includes projects and expenditure that those companies may have on behalf of the Government.

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1145 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Well, I do not see how that arises from the question on the LNG Shell Company, but of course all that the hon. Member is saying is that I am right in my analysis – and I am grateful to him for saying that – because he is saying that in fact the company that is providing the finance is a Government company and therefore, if it is a Government company, then he cannot be arguing that a different entity is providing money to the Government. Logically, his argument would only be consistent with what he has said in the past if he accepts that the Government is a very small minority shareholder – that is to say it is a shareholder that has £30 million out of £430 million. As far as I am concerned, the logic is that the decisions on the investments are determined predominantly for the benefit of the owner of the £400 million, which is the Gibraltar Savings Bank, which is why I am answering this question.

1155 **Hon. D A Feetham:** A final question, Mr Speaker. The point is that you can have a Government-owned company that is capitalised, that is provided with capital, with money, by the Gibraltar Savings Bank. It does not alter the nature of the beast, of the vehicle. The vehicle is a Government-owned company, at least partly so. It may be funded by the Gibraltar Savings Bank but it is a Government-owned company and it is then a Government-owned company that makes the decisions, be it on behalf of the shareholders or whatever, but it is a Government-owned company that is making the decisions as to where the money is being invested. It is actually being invested in other Government-owned companies and those other Government-owned companies are using it in order to fund projects that the hon. Gentleman promised a multiplicity of people at the last election and indeed previously in the 2011 election.

1165 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Mr Speaker, Credit Finance invests money that it has obtained by issuing shares. It invests the money in order to make a profit so that the debenture holders are able to get the return that they do.

1170 There is no way that the hon. Members opposite can be in favour of the Savings Bank having debentures and paying the rates that they do and against the Savings Bank deploying those funds in accordance with the power that it has to do under the law to make a profit.

1175 I do not know if it is that the hon. Member prefers that the profits should go to a bank that is not owned by the Government and that when capital has to be raised it should be raised from other banks, which is something they used to do when they were in Government, when they used to put money in Barclays Bank and then borrow money from Barclays Bank, except that when they lent it to Barclays Bank they were getting 1% and when they borrowed it they were paying 6%.

1180 If and when the Members form the next Government of Gibraltar they can stop Credit Finance, they can reduce the activity of the Savings Bank, they can go back to having reserves of £1,444.45 instead of £25 million. That is their prerogative, but they will have to get a vote to do that. We have got a vote to enable us to do what we are doing and all that we are here to do is to explain to him how it is being done, which he does not have to agree with.

1185 **Hon. D A Feetham:** And I am very grateful to him always for his candid explanations, which certainly when he does explain things I always find very helpful. But drilling down to where the differences are here, which are highlighted and actually come out of that answer, yes, of course if you are taking debentures ... the Gibraltar Savings Bank, I mean, is taking money from customers, it has got to offer a rate, and from 2011 to 2013 it was offering rates that went up to about 5%. That was *well over* market rates. There is not an investment, unless one is talking about riskier investments ... very difficult to actually have safe investments that will offer – it is impossible – more than 5%. Indeed, banks, UK Treasury gilts, they were all offering less than 1% for most of that period. What is happening here, and I would like the hon. Gentleman to confirm it, is that the money from the Gibraltar Savings Bank into Credit Finance is actually being invested in the Government of Gibraltar. That is where it is being invested, and therefore it is the Government of Gibraltar, because it is those Government-owned companies that are owned ...

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1200 that is where the money is actually going. It is Gibraltar Investment Holdings, the Government-owned company, and all the other Government-owned companies that are benefitting from this money, and therefore the Government ... That is the investment. It is the Government ultimately that is going to have to repay this. That is why we have always said, 'Well, actually, it is the Government – indirectly, through this complicated vehicle – that is actually borrowing the money, even though technically speaking it is off the books as Government debt. Apart from the *Sunborn*, I have to say that I cannot think of on my feet any private investment or significant private investment into which the £400 million has actually been paid, other than into Government-owned companies for Government projects.

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Hon. J J Bossano: Mr Speaker, the question is about the investment in the LNG plant which has been made by Credit Finance – and he says he cannot think of anything other than the *Sunborn*. The question that we have by Mr Clinton is about the LNG investment. The LNG investment is by Credit Finance on a return. The joint venture, if it is with anybody, is a joint venture between Credit Finance and Shell, not between the Government and Shell.

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The issue is whether a company which is owned with £400 million out of £430 million by the Savings Bank and £30 million by the Gibraltar Development Corporation is a Government company. That is what the issue is. As far as I am concerned, it is not a Government company because the Government is a minority. But if they would be more comfortable if it was 100% owned by the Savings Bank, then I am prepared to make them happy by spending £30 million and buying the 30 million shares and then they do not have to worry anymore.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I hope to wrap up on this particular question and then move on to other ones. In terms of this particular investment by Credit Finance and Shell LNG, can the Minister then ... If I understood him correctly, he is telling the House that the Shell LNG Gibraltar plant is not a Government joint venture project. Is that correct?

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Hon. J J Bossano: I am telling him that it is not a joint venture between the Government of Gibraltar using a Government company, but it is a joint venture between Shell and Credit Finance, which has got a minority shareholding of the Government. That is what I am telling him.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Again, just wrapping up on this, can the Minister advise – and again this is a hypothetical question – in terms of Credit Finance whether he would be willing to provide information in terms of the equity investments that Credit Finance makes?

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Hon. J J Bossano: If by the equity investment what he wants to know is the number of shares that there are, then the number of shares that there are he knows already from the registry that he says he has gone to look at.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, yes, I am not referring specifically to Shell LNG; I am talking in general of any other equity investments that Credit Finance may hold.

Hon. J J Bossano: He has already had the answer to that question before. That answer has not changed.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I would be grateful if the Minister could refresh my memory in terms of in which question specifically I asked that.

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Hon. J J Bossano: I will refresh his memory: the answer was no. *(Laughter)*

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, again I beg your indulgence because there are quite a few questions to get through.

1250 Going to Question 292, where the Minister advised the House that he has not invited any expressions of interest for the shareholding in Gibtelecom, can I ask the Minister: does he undertake an annual valuation exercise of the shares that the Savings Bank holds in Gibtelecom in terms of potential earnings, multiples, etc?

1255 **Hon. J J Bossano:** No, Mr Speaker, we carry the shares that are not quoted. He will remember that he asked me a long time ago about whether shares were quoted or not quoted and I told him that they were not quoted because they are not on a stock exchange, even though there was a reference to quoting in the paperwork that I supplied him with.

1260 The value is the value at which we purchased a share. Probably if we were to do a valuation based on the return which we are getting, which is an 8% return, the capital would be worth more, but that is not the way we do it.

If we were at some stage to dispose of the shares, then clearly the remaining shares would be revalued at whatever money was paid for the ones that we sold, because that would be logical.

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

1265 If I can move to Question 293 in terms of inflation and the public sector pay increases, does the Minister have a view as to inflation and how far it may or may not go up again? I will defer if he says it is a hypothetical question but I am sure he has some feel for where the number may be; and if so, in terms of the public sector pay increases, does he have a cost for honouring that commitment, at say the 2.75% level certainly for this year, in terms of the overall cost of the inflationary increase?
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1275 **Hon. J J Bossano:** Well, Mr Speaker, in the estimates we always include a figure from which – I think something like £9 million, which is well above what is required for the pay review, but that has always been the case – and it is from that figure that there is a provision that is then distributed along the heads of expenditure when pay settlements are made and that meets the cost of the pay, which is an important part of that £9 million, and increases either for other charges that may come in at a higher figure than expected ... Inflation will be something that will affect the Government's Budget not just in respect of salaries but in respect of procurement.

1280 So the answer is that the figure ... I cannot tell him what the figure is going to be in this year's Budget because we have not yet done the Budget and it would be wrong to pre-empt those figures, which he will be able to see at the end of April, but it is unlikely to be less than what we have provided in the past because if we look at inflation before the period where prices were, I think, deliberately being kept down and interest rates were being deliberately kept down by this policy of quantitative easing, which put a lot of money in the market, something like 2.5% to 3%
1285 was considered to be a normal rate of inflation.

1290 Indeed, a lot of Governments have been trying to get the level of inflation to go up to the 2% target of the Bank of England because they consider that in order to stimulate economic growth there has to be an element of inflation in the economy, and when inflation has been at zero, or in some cases below zero, negative when prices have been falling, then that is considered to be a recession if it happens in two consecutive quarters according to the mantra that most economists subscribe to – but I do not necessarily do.

1295 But the answer to his question is I think we need to think of inflation around the 3% figure as normality, because all we need to do is to go back some three years and we will find that ... For example, in the years before ... In 2012 it was 3.7%, in 2011 it was 3.5%, in 2010 it was 3.4%. Those are the recent figures until this very strange period that we have lived in the last few years, which has been artificially engineered.

RECESS

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I am going to have to move that the House should now recess until 3.30 this afternoon, when the supplementary questions etc. will be able to continue.

Mr Speaker: The House will now recess until 3.30 this afternoon.

The House recessed at 12.32 p.m. and resumed its sitting at 3.30 p.m.