



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 3.10 p.m. – 5.02 p.m.

Gibraltar, Thursday, 9th May 2019

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 3.10 p.m.

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

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

Precincts of Parliament – Ruling by Mr Speaker

Clerk: Meeting of Parliament, Thursday, 9th May 2019.

Suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Minister for Health, Care and Justice.

5 **Mr Speaker:** May I, before the Chief Minister moves the suspension of Standing Orders, Members will recall that at the meeting of 11th April I made reference to a ruling of Mr Speaker, Sir Robert Peliza, on the designation of the Precincts of the House. My reference to this ruling arose from the demonstration at the entrance to the lobby of Parliament, since I was concerned that access to the House was being impeded.

10 In 1993 Sir Robert Peliza designated the precincts of the House to include the lobby, the pavement on the western side of Main Street in front of the House, the whole area of the Piazza and the public highway on its three sides. He had issued this ruling as a result of a demonstration that had occurred just before the House met on 28th October 1993. Groups of people had carried out a demonstration and displayed placards within the lobby, during the course of which
15 Members, particularly the Chief Minister, were stopped and questioned in circumstances that could have led to obstruction. The Speaker was empowered under section 80 of the House of Assembly Ordinance to designate the Precincts of Parliament from time to time.

20 On reflection, it is my considered view that this designation is perhaps too extensive and unnecessary. Insofar as the western pavement is concerned, one also has to take note of the fact that two thirds of this area is currently taken up by commercial premises. What is important is that, as well as the lobby, the area directly in front of the three arches on the western pavement should be kept clear at all times.

25 The Clerk has recently held a series of meetings with the Royal Gibraltar Police and the Gibraltar Law Officers. As a result of these meetings, I have received written confirmation from the Commissioner of Police that there will be a police presence prior to and at the termination of every session of Parliament in the immediate area of the entrance to the lobby of Parliament to ensure the clear and unobstructed passage of the Speaker, Members and any staff members.

30 Given the assurances that I have now received regarding adequate policing, and as empowered by the Parliament Act, I am amending the ruling made by Sir Robert Peliza and I now rule that the Precincts of Parliament will include the lobby and the area directly in front of the three arches on the western pavement.

**Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with laying of paper –
Papers laid**

Clerk: We now proceed with the suspension of Standing Orders. The Hon. the Minister for Health.

Minister for Health, Care and Justice (Hon. N F Costa): Mr Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table: the Annual Report of the Parole Board 2018, the Extradition Act 2018 – Codes of Practice, and the Command Paper on a draft Bill to make provision for surrogacy arrangements and parental orders.

Mr Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Order of the Day

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

Mr Speaker: The Hon. the Chief Minister.

Clerk: (vii) Reports of Committees.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, I have the honour to lay on the table the Report of the Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform.

Mr Speaker: Ordered to lie.

Questions for Oral Answer

COMMERCE

Q45-46/2019

**Digital Transformation Programme –
Road map for e-government and digital services;
expected date for paperless public service**

Clerk: (viii) We now move to answers to Oral Questions and we commence with Question 45. The questioner is the Hon. L F Llamas.

Hon. L F Llamas: Mr Speaker, further to Question 481/2018, can the Government provide details in relation to the extensive procurement process carried out and the persons involved in taking the decision?

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

55 **Minister for Commerce (Hon. A J Isola):** Mr Speaker, I will answer this question together with Question 46/2019.

Clerk: Question 46. The Hon. L F Llamas.

60 **Hon. L F Llamas:** Mr Speaker, by when does the Government envisage having paperless departments in the public sector?

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

65 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, the major aspects of the Digital Transformation Programme underwent an extensive procurement process to ensure that the Government selected an appropriate ERP system to meet our needs. Various Government organisations were involved in the process, including: the Treasury; the Office of the Financial Secretary; the Human Resources Department (Civil Service and Public Service); the Gibraltar Health Authority; the Information, Technology and Logistics Department (ITLD); my Ministry; and other Government organisations and officials that formed part of the process on an ad hoc basis.

70 Some aspects of the project exceeded the EU threshold for public procurement, so the Government made use of EU framework contracts for some of the awards. Framework contracts allow contracting authorities to award individual contracts as long as they satisfy the conditions of the framework and achieve contractual compliance. These conditions are over and above any local requirement for public procurement. The EU framework that we used for this purpose is Health Trust Europe.

75 The procurement selection process involved a competitive tender between leading global providers. The process culminated with three preferred suppliers having been scrutinised and gradually reducing the tenderers by a second and third round of evaluation, eliminating providers at each stage and ending up with the final, preferred provider in accordance with the agreed process for determination of bids. The winning bid was finally approved by the Government Project Steering Committee, involving Ministerial and senior Government stakeholders.

80 E-government and the Digital Transformation Programme is introducing a working environment where current paper-driven procedures are replaced by digital and automated alternatives. Government is also progressing on the development of its Purchase to Pay software, which is currently operational in 17 Government organisations. The software has contributed to a diminished use of paper, specifically the use of paper requisition forms, local purchase orders and payment vouchers and the subsequent use of paper, including copies in triplicate, which currently forms part of the payment process for the Departments, including the Treasury, that still rely on manual processes.

85 We are making steady progress across all areas of the Digital Transformation Programme but it is too early to begin to estimate with any degree of accuracy by when we will have paperless departments in Government.

90 **Hon. L F Llamas:** Mr Speaker, I thank the hon. Member for that answer. Could the Hon. Minister confirm whether senior management members of the ITLD department were part of that steering committee, please?

100 **Hon. A J Isola:** Mr Speaker, from memory I cannot recall if they were in the final steering committee that made the decision based on the advice they had received from all the different organisations I referred to, including ITLD, or were involved in the process. I cannot recall if they were actually on the final steering committee, which was: Head of Treasury, Financial Secretary ... in other words, the users as opposed to the operators.

105

Q47/2019
Government bodies –
Number of payroll systems in operation

Clerk: Question 47. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government please advise and list how many distinct payroll systems are operated across the Government, Government Authorities, the Gibraltar Development Corporation and all directly or indirectly owned companies for which an annual payroll software licence is paid?

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

Minister for Commerce (Hon. A J Isola): Mr Speaker, the Government operates the following payroll systems – and in saying that, I have to clarify at the outset that it is in fact one payroll system but with a number of variations, so I am talking about four different configurations, not four different payroll systems, if that makes sense.

Government payroll: wages, salaries and pensions. This includes payroll preparation for the Authorities and Agencies not listed below.

GHA payroll: salaries. This includes Elderly Residential Services.

Education: supply teachers, SNLSAs, lecturers and invigilators.

Care Agency: supply staff, which is a monthly roll.

No annual software licence is paid for the above, as the Government is the owner of the source code.

The payroll application operates within a shared operating system with the Government Income Tax application. The combined maintenance cost is circa £131,000 per annum.

The majority of Government-owned companies use the Treasury salary system for the preparation of salaries. A small group of Government-owned companies rely on third parties such as PWC or GJBS to prepare the payroll systems.

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

In terms of the four payroll variations that he mentioned, would I be correct in saying – and I am happy, if I am wrong, for him to correct me – that there are in fact staff dedicated to producing, for example, the payroll for the GHA, a separate one for Education, a separate one for the Care Agency and a supplement for Government in general? Or is it that there is one centralised payroll function that then does that job for these different entities?

Hon. A J Isola: My understanding is that there are currently different people in each of those four areas working on payroll. Part of the e-government project will centralise that into one payroll system within HR, which is where we believe it should be parked to give us a far more efficient method of working.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Minister for his answer, and of course I wholeheartedly recommend that what he suggests is in fact undertaken because there are obvious efficiencies to be had.

Q48/2019
Financial Services Bill –
Extent of consultation with industry

Clerk: Question 48. The Hon. D A Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Does the Minister consider that the financial services industry has been properly consulted on the Financial Services Bill before its intended implementation date on 29th March 2019?

This question has obviously been overtaken by events.

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

Minister for Commerce (Hon. A J Isola): It has indeed been overtaken by events, Mr Speaker, and as will be obvious to everyone, no is the simple answer. I imagine we would have engaged in a different discussion at the time, but my answer as recorded is: the Financial Services Bill will not be and has not been introduced before 29th March 2019. We have been consulting on this Bill with the Finance Centre Council, representing the financial services industry, since July 2017 and will continue to do so.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, my understanding is that originally the intention was to take certain aspects of the legislation that were linked to Brexit coupled with substantive reforms of the system in which the FSC operates, but the Government has now decided to decouple both and in the future is going to be proceeding with reform of the system not necessarily linked to what needs to happen in a Brexit situation.

Hon. A J Isola: Mr Speaker, what happened – which is where I imagine the information to the hon. Member led him to the question – was that in late January/February we were faced with a looming hard Brexit. With a lot of preparatory work having to be carried out in order to ensure that our transition from one system to the other with the UK passporting systems worked, it required an awful lot of work and consequently what we did was we issued an instruction to cease work on the new Financial Services Bill. I imagine that is the reference you made to decoupling. We ceased work on the LRP and we worked extensively on preparing ourselves for the hard Brexit by 29th March. Before that, the intention was to bring in the Financial Services Bill and then to do the Brexit work post that, but basically we ran out of time and we were not able to complete the new legislation with sufficient time to consult the industry properly on it before going ahead.

The position today is that the Brexit work is ready as and when that may need to be done, if it is needed at all, and the Financial Services Bill is working to its own final programme, which I hope to be very soon, and we are consulting on significant chunks of that with the Finance Centre Council, so by the time we publish the Bill – shortly – we will be in a position to have taken on board people's views before we take it further.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

HOUSING AND EQUALITY

Q77/2019

**Blue Wave House –
Works carried out since erection of scaffolding**

Clerk: We now move to Question 77 and the questioner is the Hon. T N Hammond.

Hon. T N Hammond: Have any works been carried out since the erection of scaffolding at
190 Blue Wave House in Mid Harbour estate?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the scaffolding
195 on the west side of Blue Wave House, Mid Harbour Estate, was erected in December 2018 to
carry out a survey to ascertain the condition of the facade. There now needs to be a second,
more intensive survey undertaken.

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Trevor Hammond.
200

Hon. T N Hammond: Presumably the outcome of the first survey indicated that there was
some flaw or fault in the system, which is presumably why a second survey needs to be carried
out. Five months, approximately, have passed since that first survey. Can the Minister assure
residents that the action is being taken as quickly as possible in order that the scaffolding does
205 not have to remain in place any longer than necessary?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, the issue of concern is that the scaffolding has to be
up at all in a building that was constructed merely 10 years ago. It is of great concern that the
survey needs to be undertaken in the first place, of greater concern that the result of that survey
210 is that we need a further one. It goes without saying that any works that need to be done and
any remedial works will be done as quickly as possible, but what is regrettable is that they need
to be done at all.

Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, inevitably that was along the lines of the response that was
215 expected. Of course, I will not refer to the likes of Montagu Gardens and other estates that had
similar issues, or may have or certainly had issues in which scaffolding had to be re-erected after
construction. I do not want to get into the politics of that. I just want to get assurances that,
because five months is a long time for two surveys to take place, presumably then if those
surveys require remedial works, are the residents going to be with the scaffolding in place for a
220 year, two years, five years? Does the Minister have any idea, in terms of forward planning, about
how long the residents may have to have the scaffolding in place?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Well, Mr Speaker, given that some of the tenants affected by the
fault in the construction of this building have massive cracks in the walls, then clearly of course it
225 is our desire to remedy this as soon as possible. The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we
will remedy the defective construction of this building built by them when in office.

Q78/2019
Malaya House –
Nature of works underway

Clerk: Question 78. The Hon. T N Hammond.

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Hon. T N Hammond: Mr Speaker, what works are being carried out at Malaya House in Varyl Begg Estate, which I am pretty sure was not constructed by the GSD?

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

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Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, minor repairs are being carried out to a number of flats in this block.

Q79/2019
Housing medical list –
Number of applicants and room composition required

Clerk: Question 79. The Hon. L F Llamas.

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Hon. L F Llamas: Mr Speaker, can the Government provide a schedule with the details for each applicant currently on the housing medical list, including the date each applicant was listed and the room composition required?

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

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Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I apologise to the hon. Gentleman: I meant to have a copy of the schedule. I will circulate one in a moment, but I will read it out in the meantime.

250

Since 2013, there are two on the 1RKB list, one on the 2RKB, no one on the 3RKB or the 4RKB and one on the 5RKB.

For 2014, there are 12 on the 1RKB, nobody on the 2RKB, 3RKB or 4RKB and one on the 5RKB.

For 2015, five on the 1RKB, one on the 2RKB, none on the 3RKB and none on the 4RKB and the 5RKB.

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There are eight on the 1RKB for 2016, two on the 2RKB, none on the 3RKB, two on the 4RKB and none on the 5RKB.

In 2017, there are 21 on the 1RKB, three on the 2RKB, two on the 3RKB, four on the 4RKB and none on the 5RKB.

For 2018, there are 28 on the 1RKB, 15 on the 2RKB, five on the 3RKB, one on the 4RKB and none on the 5RKB.

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For 2019, so far we have five on the 1RKB, one on the 2RKB, five on the 3RKB, one on the 4RKB and one on the 5RKB.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q80/2019

**Hassan Centenary Terraces affordable housing scheme –
Cost and financing of construction**

265 **Clerk:** Question 80. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise the anticipated total cost of the new Hassan Centenary Terraces affordable housing scheme; and how does it propose to finance its construction?

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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, the tender processes remain ongoing and this information is commercially sensitive at this time.

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Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, the hon. Lady may be able to correct me, but I understand the price lists have been published and people are being invited to sign contracts to purchase flats. Is she actually saying that they are inviting people to sign contracts when they do not know what the cost is going to be? Is that what she is telling the House?

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Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman has obviously not had experience of being involved as a developer of property.

The nature of the relationship between a developer and a contractor is one which gives rise to a price but not a final negotiation in respect of additional works that may be required. So, what the Government has done is ensured that we are able to progress with the works and progress with the sales and will carry the risk of the purchase prices not covering the construction costs in the event that the final prices were, as yet, not finally agreed.

We have little reason to think that the final price will be different to that which is now on the table and is being finessed. Indeed, it may be that we are able to obtain an even better deal for the taxpayer than we have obtained already. We have conducted the negotiation as diligently and as effectively as we conducted it in relation to the two comprehensive schools, the price of which led the Hon. Mr Feetham to suggest that we were in fact the best negotiators on the planet.

So I am very pleased, Mr Speaker, to be able to confirm that although the price is not yet final and therefore cannot be given across the floor of the House, it is as near as final as possible but there are permutations still which are to be agreed. We do not believe that that creates any meaningful risk to the Government, but it is not yet a final, signed, agreed, figure.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the Chief Minister for his candid response and the information.

The second half of my question was: how does the Government effectively propose to finance it? He says he has more or less a figure for the cost, but I would like to know how he is going to propose to finance that.

We know in the House that people who are signing up to purchase these apartments are being asked to make, effectively, capital down-payments monthly towards the final purchase price, so I imagine the Chief Minister will say x amount will come from purchasers, but I would like to know where y is going to come from, the rest that is not being financed by the purchasers. Can the Chief Minister give me an indication?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the payments from purchasers are in keeping with the mechanism which was established some time ago as to how we sell affordable housing. Indeed,

in the time that hon. Members were in government and they were responsible for the sales of affordable housing, they also required purchasers to make staged payments against the delivery of their properties. So, that part of the process does not seem to me to be one that can be controversial, and in some instances people historically have said, 'The staged payments ahead of completion are relatively high, so I obtain what is known as a bridging loan, those payments are made on the bridging loan, I pay the bridging loan and the bridging then becomes part of the mortgage at the time of completion.' That is the standard way in which successive administrations have sold affordable property, so I would be surprised if he was surprised at that.

From the tenor of his question he did not seem to be addressing that; he would seem to be suggesting that the Government itself was going to have to find the money to make the payments against the contractor, in respect of which there would be a shortfall from the amounts that were paid by the purchasers – which is, of course, the case. I anticipate making a detailed statement on how the Government is going to do that at the very latest during the course of the Budget debate, perhaps earlier.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I must say I find the latter half of his contribution now has piqued my interest. The Chief Minister will perhaps say 'I'm not going to tell you now, I will tell you at the time of the Budget,' but is it not that the Government is in fact intending to borrow more money in order to finance the building of these affordable houses?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, the hon. Gentleman asked me when I am going to say how we are going to do something. Then, when I tell him when I intend to tell him how we are going to do something, he starts to present me with the different options that may be the ones we have taken to do something before I have told him I will tell him how we are going to do that thing. I am not going to be led up the garden path of doing a multiple-choice examination of how we are going to finance, whether it is by A, B, C, D or E.

If I have peaked his interest, Mr Speaker, I intend to keep him piqued until the moment comes when I am going to make the statement. It is not that I do not want to tell him today; it is that I am finalising the details of how it is going to be done. I want to be able to make a detailed statement, which means that there will be no need for hon. Members to speculate any further about how the financing is going to occur, or indeed for members of the community to speculate as to how the Government is going to finance the building of these homes, and indeed will assuage those concerns that some may have about whether or not governments – not this one or the next one but governments generally – can continue to fund affordable housing for future generations of working people in Gibraltar, which is a principle that was established by the GSLP in 1988 when we founded the principle of affordable homes, and 50/50 homes in particular, and which we have continued in association with the Liberal Party now that we are in government.

So, as soon as I am able to make the statement, I will do so, as I have indicated to the hon. Gentleman a moment ago.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, I realise from the what the hon. Gentleman has said that he is not going to condescend into any kind of details, but does the Government envisage that it will have to pay a balance over and above what it actually collects from potential purchasers? And if that is the position, in broad terms does the Government have an idea of the percentage that we are talking about that it will need to fund over and above the contribution of purchasers? In broad terms.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I can give the hon. Gentleman that figure almost entirely to a T, without regard to the fact that there is a loss of value on the premium of the land, of course, because, as he knows, the principle established in 1988 is that the land is provided at no cost. So

the contribution in terms of the development cost in all of the work that we have done, because we do not give any advantage to somebody who wishes to acquire 100% of the property, is likely to be in the region of 50%.

Q81/2019

**Housing rent payment office –
Reason for relocation**

Clerk: Question 81. The Hon. R M Clinton.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, can the Government advise why it moved the housing rent payment office from the Main Street Post Office to New Harbours?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the rent collection office has not been moved from the Post Office to New Harbours. The rent collection office has always been located in the Housing Department, which is at New Harbours since it moved from City Hall in January 2016.

In February 2016, an additional counter was opened at the post office temporarily, with a view to it being phased out once people got used to the new arrangements. This temporary additional counter – which, when it closed last year, had only been open for one week a month – was finally phased out last summer. This was announced publicly in a press release dated 13th July 2018.

The Housing Department has modernised its systems and made available alternate methods of payment which include deductions at source for all public servants and occupational pensions, standing order payments and online payments on the e-gov service. These are actively encouraged and have proved to be very popular. These initiatives have had a very positive result in reducing the number of people who paid in person, to the point that it reduced by 80% and it was therefore deemed not viable to have the additional temporary counter at the post office any longer, as the demand was not high enough since tenants took up the many other options available to them to pay the rent.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her answer.

I noticed today, having walked past the post office, that the space that was once the rent collection counter, temporary as it was, is now occupied by Gibraltar Car Parks for the payment of fixed penalty notices.

Mr Speaker, if I may quote from a newsletter published on 7th May this year by the Gibraltar Senior Citizens Association, of which she must of course be aware, what they say is:

As is well known, we are much opposed to seniors having to go to New Harbours to pay their rents, so we have proposed a venue to Minister Sacramento where arrangements for deduction from pensions or direct debits can be done quite hassle free for the elderly.

I would be grateful if the Minister could give us her thoughts on the matter.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, needless to say, I have a close working relationship with Mr Ruiz from the Senior Citizens Association. We have come to an arrangement whereby Mr Ruiz assists us in this policy, because in turn it assists his elderly members. He distributes for the Housing Department the forms that enable senior citizens to have the rent deducted by

standing order or any other methods that are available to them. On this basis, we work closely together. He facilitates the making of the arrangements so that he distributes the forms to his members and his members take them to the bank, and there is no need thereafter for the members to come to any counter to pay the rent.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I am sure the House will congratulate this individual for his citizenship in helping his fellow elderly persons, but from my reading of the newsletter it is apparent that they are looking for a venue and that he has proposed a venue to the Minister. Can the Minister confirm whether that is the case, and does she have a venue in mind? Or is she saying that she has no intention of providing a venue similar to what was available on Main Street before?

I will tell the Minister that we have actually had very distressed senior citizens coming to see us because they cannot make the trip down to New Harbours because it is not that easy for them. A lot of these people are not used to the idea of direct debits and it may be a question of providing a transitional service to get them onto the system. Of course I understand the efficiency gains in doing that, but in the meantime would the Minister consider at least providing some kind of temporary assistance until they are satisfied that everybody who needs to be is on the direct debit system where everybody is happy? Because it is evident that people are not happy and she can very easily address this issue.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, a transitional period, as the hon. Member suggests, has been in place since 2016 to the point where the foot traffic for payment had been reduced by 80%. The hon. Gentleman, being a man of figures, a man of numbers and overall a man who promotes efficiency in the public sector, does not seem to be able to match these figures together.

The methods that we have introduced actually help elderly citizens and senior citizens in the payment of their rent, not only because it is more convenient to sign a mandate for a standing order and it is deducted from your bank account on a monthly basis and you do not have to worry about it thereafter – not only is that more convenient than having to go and personally pay it at a counter, whatever counter, every month, but it is all the more important for elderly citizens who may be forgetful or, for any other reasons, may find it inconvenient to pay in person on a monthly basis. Regardless of where the counter is, it may be too hot, it may be too cold, it may be raining, they may forget, other things may happen.

The measures that we have introduced are not only more efficient for the public sector and help us work smarter because we can dedicate our time to the back office and other things and other demands within the Department, but it is actually better, safer and more practical, particularly for elderly people because they are assured of paying their rent on a monthly basis. One of the things that concerns elderly people the most is paying their rent every month on time. Those who worry and those who pay rent are very particular about ensuring that they pay their rent on the first day of the month and it is a big fuss for them to pay their rent. By introducing these measures and by encouraging these measures – and Mr Ruiz, who is the Chairman of the Senior Citizens Association, helps us encourage them to take up these measures – it works all round for everyone.

I understand that there may be people who like the physical trip to a counter and prefer counter A to counter B, but the fact is that whereas until 2016 the Housing Department was based at City Hall, it is now based at New Harbours. Whereas City Hall may have been closer for people who lived on one estate, New Harbours is now closer to other people who live on other estates. You cannot please everybody all the time, but our new offices in New Harbours are completely accessible to everyone with disability – they accommodate people in wheelchairs and on mobility scooters. There are various bus routes that arrive at the New Harbours offices. It is very welcoming for elderly people and people with disabilities. We have a lift, we have everything, but if people do not want to go and pay in person, then they are free to take up any

455 of the alternative methods of payment, which have been very successfully taken up in the last few years – the transition period that he suggests we already started three years ago.

What Mr Ruiz means from that letter and what we have agreed since then ... What he meant in the newsletter is that we agreed on a point where people could attend to complete the forms for standing order, as opposed to a point where people could go and effect payment. That is
460 what he meant and we have made arrangements for there to be several points. We have engaged with the senior citizens' clubs, we have engaged with residents of the purpose-built flats for the elderly and their committees, we have engaged and continue to engage with the tenants' associations of the various estates so that they become our agents in helping us distribute these forms and encouraging tenants to complete them and either return them to us
465 and we can return them to the bank, or they can give them to the bank directly.

It is something that is working and is working all round. In fact, Mr Speaker, I think that the hon. Gentleman should congratulate the Housing Department on the success of making it a very efficient process not only for staff, not only for the efficient recovery of rent – which is, of course, something that we all want on a monthly basis – but really for having introduced these
470 measures that facilitate the payment of rent for everyone.

Hon. R M Clinton: Mr Speaker, I certainly have no hesitation in congratulating her on introducing a more efficient rent collection system. My only concern was the distress apparently caused to some sections of our senior citizens; but if, as she says, she has engaged with the
475 Senior Citizens Association and come up with an imaginative solution that works for all, then I am fine with that and I congratulate her.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I accept his congratulations and I will go further: I will send the hon. Gentleman some of the
480 standing order slips, so that if he were to happen to bump into the very few people who still pay rent and do not have it deducted he can help them complete the form and help them submit it to the bank or to my offices.

Mr Speaker: Next question.

Q82/2019
Building of homes for rental –
Commencement date

485 **Clerk:** Question 82. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state when it will commence building homes for rental pursuant to its announcement at the 2018 Budget?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, I refer to my answer to Question 452/2018 in the last Parliament session, as well as to my previous answers to this same question and also to my Statement in Parliament on 11th April and various public
495 statements on this matter.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, does the hon. Lady agree with me that there is a real need in our community for the building of rental homes?

500 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Indeed, Mr Speaker, which is why we have already said that we will be building them. We have said where and we have said when.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, in the Minister's press release of 12th December 2018 – which was in response to a GSD housing statement in relation to rental accommodation, amongst
505 other things – the Minister said:

Since 2011, this Government has built 895 affordable homes and a further 140 purpose-built homes for rental for the elderly where priority of allocation was given to applicants on the pensioner exchange list. This resulted in the release of government rental stock in the majority of the cases. This system obviously provides an increase in the available rental housing stock. This logic is blindingly obvious.

Does the Minister agree with that statement and is that the position of the Government in relation to the provision of rental homes for our community?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, it beggars belief that the Leader of the Opposition in
510 Parliament has read to me a press release that I wrote, has read to me my quote and asked me if I have agreed with my quote. It is regrettable that, instead of reading from a press release that was issued a while ago, he has not referred to the Government's latest press release which contains my Statement to this Parliament on 11th April, at which he was not present. I would have thought that in this Parliament one would expect people to be up to date with
515 announcements that are made. While, of course, the hon. Gentleman was not here on 11th April – and I am sure that he would have had some perfectly legitimate reason for not having been here, Mr Speaker – what I told this Parliament in my statement on the 11th was that ... I announced that in our forthcoming development of affordable housing at Bob Peliza Mews we would, in addition to the construction of affordable housing, also build a block which would be
520 purposely built accommodation for the elderly. That is rental accommodation.

The hon. Gentleman I do not think at this stage can be forgiven for not understanding how the housing process works, Mr Speaker. Affordable housing, clearly and logically to anyone, has a knock-on effect on the housing waiting lists, particularly given the way that we are allocating affordable housing in these developments now. The allocation priority criteria have changed and that has been publicly announced. The first priority criterion for allocation goes to people who
525 are currently housing tenants and who deliver vacant possession of Government housing upon purchase. So, improvement number one is that by the construction of affordable housing we have more rental stock released back into the stock because we are giving the people who will give us those homes preference, and as I said on 11th April in the Statement to Parliament, on this occasion, for Hassan Centenary Terraces, we have 130 of those such applications. In addition
530 to that – and that is only the figure that relates to Hassan Centenary Terraces – I am confident that we will have more as we progress the other affordable housing estates, which will be announced, as I said, in the summer. But in addition to that we are also building housing for rental. It will be rental stock which will be purposely built for the elderly. Again, the majority of
535 the tenants of these flats will be current housing tenants, so we will be adding to the stock by way of rental flats, but those bigger flats that those elderly citizens release will also be returned to stock.

When we are building, Mr Speaker – and construction costs money, and this construction is paid for by the taxpayer – we must ensure that we construct as efficiently as possible. There is
540 nothing more efficient than constructing purpose-built homes for the elderly because not only do we provide flats but it means that our elderly citizens have a better quality of life and it promotes independent living. By doing that, not only is it better for the citizen but it has been proved to show that they can live independently for longer, thereby keeping away from the hospitals and prolonging their need for elderly residential care – and thereby there is another

545 consequential saving on the taxpayer. I am absolutely convinced that this is the best way forward.

Mr Speaker: I am not going to permit many more lengthy exchanges on this matter because there was a Statement on this from the Government and subsequent to that Statement there were lengthy exchanges across the floor of the House. The matter was well ventilated less than a month ago.

I will allow the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition one other supplementary and then we move on.

555 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, whilst the Minister for Housing attempts to wriggle on the hook that she has got herself onto for making statements in the 2018 Budget, it is quite clear – and I am asking the Minister to agree with me – that Action for Housing have been pressing her in relation to rental homes, not for the elderly but for those single dwellings that are much in need in our community.

560 Private landlords in this community have asked her specifically about what she intends to do in relation to building homes for rental. It is clear, by the numbers of people not only applying for affordable housing but those on the list for social need, that there is a real need within our community for rental homes.

565 I quite understand what she means about how homes are vacated and therefore there is stock to house those people who require homes for rental, but it simply is nonsense, Mr Speaker – and I am given to understand from members of the public that they have communicated their rationale to her, which she does not take on board; does she agree with that?

570 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, the Government fully agrees with the policy that the Minister has brought to the Cabinet and is the right policy to pursue, which is to continue to build more properties for elderly tenants of existing Government property, for all of the reasons that the hon. Lady has set out and indeed for all of the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has said that members of the public, Action for Housing and private landlords have
575 approached the hon. Lady and indeed the Government about, because this is a simple calculation that I have explained before, that the hon. Lady has explained before and which the hon. Gentleman needs to pause to understand.

Private landlords who have problem tenants – and the problem tenant may be a tenant who is paying his rent but it is just too low and the private landlord wants to be able to charge more –
580 come to the Government and say, ‘Please build more rental accommodation so that this person who presently rents from me at a low rent can rent from you at a lower rent and I can rent out at the higher rent.’ The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that that is what the Government should be pursuing. It is exactly what he said: are we listening to the private landlords? The private landlords who have property which they do not refurbish, they do not
585 invest in and they have people in who pay low rents say, ‘This person pays a low rent, therefore I cannot refurbish – you give them a home, and be me rid of this tenant.’ That is the position.

Action for Housing is representing tenants who come and see them and say, ‘I want a house and I need it now,’ and Action for Housing comes to see us but the work that they have done from the old days when there was an impossible housing list ... and sometimes they present to
590 us the needs of somebody who is 200 from the housing waiting list and they know that the person who is first should have more prominence. And of course then there are individuals who are in severe social need, who come to us because they need an allocation sooner than they might have it if they wait.

It is obvious, Mr Speaker, to anybody who looks at this that whether you support the
595 landlord’s right to get rid of a tenant who pays a low rent in order to get a tenant in who pays a higher rent – which the hon. Gentleman appears to do – whether you support Action for

Housing or whether you support those who want to move more quickly into a Government tenancy from private dwellings or from other tenancies where they may be cramped – which may be Government tenancies – whichever way you try and skin this cat, the most efficient way to build is not to build homes for rental for people who are not pensioners, for a simple reason. If you build that home, you give one home. If you build an apartment for a pensioner who is an existing Government tenant, by building one apartment you get two, at least, because the hon. Lady's magnificent management of the waiting list enables us to get more than two properties in most instances by entailing who moves around from what to where.

This seems to be complex for the Hon. the Leader of the Opposition to understand. Other Members of the Opposition have understood it. Indeed, if I may say so, I have said in this Parliament on a number of occasions that we did not think this up. This was something thought up –

Somebody is gesticulating from the Gallery, Mr Speaker, which I do not think they should do.

This was thought up by the former administration, by the GSD. They started Bishop Canilla. It was the right thing to do. We have got issues with the building quality of Bishop Canilla and we have got issues with the allocations in the way that they were done – it could have been done more efficiently – but it was something that was originated in their administration. We agreed with it. They built Albert Risso House, a much larger iteration of the original experiment at Bishop Cannilla. We have issues as to how the properties were allocated, we have got issues with the layout etc., but the concept is a right one. They took people who were in a tenancy, somebody who had a four- or five-bedroom property – which are the ones that the people that the hon. Gentleman is referring to need; most of them need the larger properties – and they moved them to a single-occupancy property at Bishop Canilla or Albert Risso House. They then got the four-bedroom or five-bedroom and gave that four-bedroom and five-bedroom to the persons who were on the waiting list, waiting. By building one property, they got two. In some instances you get three or four because you can move people around more efficiently.

So, just to do the numbers ... I think the hon. Gentleman referred to the press release saying 140: 140 times two is 280; times three – which is the number that the hon. Lady usually aims for; sometimes she gets more – is 420. In other words, from 140 you can get very near an estate, but to get that number of tenancies moved around, or to create that number of tenancies if you do not do it in this way, you have to build 400 properties, four-bedroom and five-bedroom etc.

We do not disagree that we need rental accommodation. We agree. The question is: what is the most efficient way of quickly and cost-effectively delivering rental accommodation? Is it, because you have got an old couple – who are asking us for these properties – sitting on their own in a four- or five-bedroom property and you have got somebody on the waiting list waiting for a five bedroom property, what is the efficient thing to do? To build a new four- or five-bedroom property? That is what the hon. Gentleman is saying to us. No, it is not. It is to build a one-bedroom property for the elderly – in a block which they will be delighted with because they are clamouring for them – where they are looked after, where they have the services that elderly people need, in the way that we have been providing, and which they all feel very comfortable in.

We have made the decision and we have defended the decision. We believe the most efficient, the most proper and ultimately the most comfortable position for people to be in is to build for the elderly, for the reasons I have set out. People who are on the housing waiting list are not saying to us, 'I would, please, like a new apartment in a new Government estate.' I think the hon. Gentleman would not defend that that would be what people should be entitled to seek. People say to us, 'I need a property.' There are some instances where they need smaller properties and there are some instances where they need larger properties, and that is why moving people around efficiently is an important part of how you manage the stock.

The right way to deal with the social need is to ensure that we are dealing with that other hugely important social need, which is elderly people now living on their own in very large Government properties. They set out to do it and we agree that it is the right thing to do. They

650 built an estate for rental as well; and, when they built that estate for rental, for every property that they built they got one. So you build Mid Harbours estate, you build one property, you get one property, you put one person in it. At the same time, you build something like Albert Risso House and you get two or three for every apartment.

655 Given where we are demographically, Mr Speaker, we have a very clear view, which I would ask them to consider very carefully and adopt because it is the view that they helped us develop. It is the most efficient, most socially just and cohesive approach to take and more quickly delivers 400 properties than building 400 properties. It is property rental; it is the position we have taken.

The hon. Gentleman can ask us next time again, if he likes and if Mr Speaker allows him, but we are going to give him the same answer.

660 **Mr Speaker:** I hope that it is totally relevant to the question on the Order Paper – I am prepared to call the Hon. Daniel Feetham on that basis, but to –

665 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, I would hope that I do not ask irrelevant questions, but –

Mr Speaker: But we are now more than beginning to debate – I think we have been debating for the last 20 minutes – the Government's policy on the building of homes for rental. It was stated clearly three weeks ago; it has been stated clearly again this morning. We are at Question Time.

670 I will be lenient. I will allow the hon. Member to ask a further supplementary. The Hon. Daniel Feetham.

Hon. D A Feetham: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker, for your leniency.

675 Certainly from our side it is understood, the argument that the Chief Minister has outlined, and indeed that argument is not incompatible with what my learned Friend is suggesting – that there might be a need for rental homes. But would the Chief Minister agree with me – bearing in mind that not everybody is old, that not everybody can afford the prices of the new affordable homes, which compared to previous developments are expensive and out of reach of many ordinary people – that really at the heart of this is that we need, as a community and as politicians, to take hard decisions and one of the hard decisions that we ought to be taking is introducing a rule that Government housing should only be available to those who cannot buy (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) and those who are vulnerable? Those who cannot afford to buy. Unless we are prepared to do that, we are going to always end up in a cycle of debate and counter-debate about this particular issue, because of course if you allow every single Gibraltarian on the housing waiting list, in theory you are always going to have a situation where demand outstrips supply.

685 **Mr Speaker:** Can we have a short answer, please? From the Government side we are beginning to get very lengthy answers to questions. If that is what happens now, I shudder to think what will happen when there are eight more Members asking questions and supplementaries next year.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, there has not been a motion to that effect yet.

695 **Mr Speaker:** But there will be. Going back to the point, answers from Government Ministers are becoming increasingly repetitive and lengthy.

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, if we get asked the same question at every meeting, what can you do except give the same answer?

Mr Speaker: It is a pity that the Select Committee on Parliamentary Procedure does not do anything to give the powers to control that, because it is getting out of hand completely.

705 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Well, Mr Speaker, there will be more meetings of the Select Committee, which you can ask to address, if you wish – you have done so already; I am sure you can do so again – but I think it is very unfair of you to say that Government answers are becoming lengthy.

710 **Mr Speaker:** Not at all, it is a fact. The Hon. the Chief Minister, who very often quotes *Hansard*, should look at the *Hansard* and he will see the number of pages that are taken up by very lengthy answers from Ministers. It has been going on for some time now.

Hon. Chief Minister: Well, Mr Speaker, in that case the answer to the hon. Gentleman is no. If Mr Speaker wants me to give the hon. Gentleman a short answer, the answer is no. His question is ‘Does he agree?’ so the answer is no.

715 But in order to be able to be open with this House, to provide this House with information in order to give the detail to this House that this House in my view deserves, as Leader of the House I am going to give a full and detailed answer to the question that you have allowed the hon. Gentleman to put, which was not a short question. It was a lengthy question with a very lengthy preamble which requires an analysis of the demographic of the tenancies that we enjoy
720 today as a landlord of the Government, and an analysis also of the policy that led to hon. Gentlemen having to build for rental, which was the sale of post-war property, which is what I intend to do.

I do not know whether you want to say something before I embark on my answer.

725 **Mr Speaker:** You know what my views are. Please carry on.

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Speaker, the experience of the Government has been that no ordinary people, as the hon. Gentleman prefaced his question, have refused an offer at Hassan Centenary Terraces on the
730 basis that they are unable to afford the price, so I fully accept that developing some years after we developed Mons Calpe and Beach View Terraces, obviously in particular with the collapse of the pound against the euro, the cost in pounds of property in Gibraltar has gone up. That is an inescapable reality. It is not about Government selling for more or selling for less. The Government is not selling for a profit, the Government is selling to cover costs without including
735 the premium, but the price goes up perforce because of the difficulty that we have had with the currency.

If people were saying, ‘Look, I’d love to, but I can’t,’ then the hon. Gentleman would have a point that we would have to address. People are not saying that at all. There may be an urban myth to that effect, but the reality is that everybody who has been called has said, ‘Fantastic,
740 when can I come and choose?’

The second point, Mr Speaker, is that the hon. Gentleman is making an argument which he has made consistently in this House on the premise of somehow further restricting who is eligible for Government housing. The hon. Members went to the election with a policy of means testing for Government housing and we do not share that view. We have taken a different
745 approach to the way that we do this. We think that people go on the housing waiting list not because they want to rent if they are able to buy, but because they want to buy and they want to thereby signify their entitlement to buy. So I think that he is wrong in prefacing his question in that way and therefore a short answer to his question would fail to address the fact that that part of the premise on which his question is based is wrong.

750 Next, Mr Speaker, is the issue of the demographic. We have an ageing tenant population in a lot of the established estates. I go to our estates often. I am looking at what is happening in the refurbishments, I am talking to tenants and principally what I am told is, ‘Please build more for

pensioner accommodation because I would love a pensioner flat and I will leave you my lovely maisonette in Brother O'Brien,' or 'I will leave you my fantastic four-bedroom here or my five-bedroom there.' That is what I am told, I have direct experience of it and the hon. Lady has a number of phone calls a day probably seeking exactly that, so the demographics do not speak to what the hon. Gentleman is saying.

We had the Hon. Mr Reyes telling us that he is not a tenant, he is an owner, but he too has reached the stage in his life when he would like that possibility and I gave an indication that we are looking at whether it is possible to develop for those purposes – rather than provide rentals, to provide potential for affordable-ish purchase in that vein to move people on, also on the affordable ladder.

So, Mr Speaker, the demographic tells us that we have a lot, now, of people who are single and living in properties larger than the ones that they need. Usually the call for a two- or three-bedroom comes from people who are living with an elderly couple – so you have got an elderly couple living with their son or daughter with grandson and grandchild – and they are the ones who need a quick move. That is where the pressure is, but they are not tenants. The tenants are the pensioners. So you build a pensioner flat and you resolve that problem also. So we are not seeing, in fact, the sorts of pressures that one might hear on the street, on social media etc., are the demographic reality of what is happening.

We have a different approach. I think it has become clear the hon. Gentleman's approach is to means test and restrict who goes on the housing waiting list. Ours has not been that.

They built a rental estate and they built rental for the elderly. One of the reasons they had to do that was because their management of the stock was different to ours. They started to sell the post-war stock and so they were denuding the Government as landlord of rental properties available. If you sell something for £12,000 or £20,000 which costs £150,000 to build, we do not think that is the right way to manage the stock.

And so for all of those reasons, which I have broken down, Mr Speaker, not in an attempt to go on for longer just because I wanted to go against you, but because the hon. Gentleman was making demographic points which were wrong in the preface to his question and I needed to break them down to tell him that I do not agree with him.

Q83/2019

Housing waiting list –

Number of applicants waiting since December 2011

Clerk: Question 83. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state how many people who were on the housing list on 8th December 2011 are still waiting for an allocation of a home?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, excluding allocations and earmarks, 83 applicants remain.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, does the hon. Lady – and I appreciate she may need notice of this question – have the breakdown in relation to those requests, be they 1RKB etc?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, I do have the breakdown: 74 of those are from the one 1RKB list. As an aside, I do not have the exact figure but a high percentage, and certainly more than 50%, are people who require elderly accommodation.

800 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Therefore, Mr Speaker, the other 50% are either young families or single individuals with no children?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, they are individuals, a lot of whom joined the list in order to be eligible to buy in the affordable housing.

805 **Hon. D A Feetham:** But does she have a breakdown in relation to that? Certainly there are a number of people who come to see me – and increasingly I am seeing a lot of people on housing issues – who are people who, for example, have a matrimonial split and the husband invariably is then told, ‘You only qualify for a one-bedroom flat,’ despite the fact that he may have, for example, three children. That has been the policy and I am not criticising the Government for it
810 because it was the policy when we were there and I have said in this House that I had disagreements with the former Chief Minister about this because I think it is terribly unfair. But does she have a breakdown of elderly people and younger people who just require either a one-bedroom flat or indeed the Housing Authority has said, ‘Well, you only qualify for a one bedroom flat’?

815 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** No, Mr Speaker, because that was not the question. I happened to have the breakdown for the first supplementary; the second supplementary is quite far removed. In fact, the hon. Gentleman may not be aware that the actual question is limited to those who were on the waiting list before December 2011, so it is limited to that. It is not about
820 everybody who is on the waiting list; it is qualified to that. I have the breakdown of how many people are on the 1RKB. Who they are and what the demographic of the waiting list of the 1RKB pre-2011 remaining I do not have.

To clarify the point that the hon. Gentleman wanted to raise in relation to people who are separated and have children, we generally continue the policy that has always been in place,
825 because of obviously the limited stock that is available. Where a couple divorces or separates, whether the children are considered in the allocation depends on the legal status that the parent will have on the child. If there is, by way of a separation agreement or a court order, joint residence of the child, then the child will certainly be included in the application, but in the absence of that the child will not be included in the application. On that basis, we have been
830 flexible in our policy for affordable housing and are allowing people the opportunity to buy an additional bedroom, and this was precisely to assist people who are separated, have children, but may not necessarily have the joint residence of the children.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, I just ask this question. I do not want to reopen a debate on this
835 question on the –

Mr Speaker: [Inaudible] debate.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, I am just stating from the outset that it is remarkable that 50%
840 of 74 people, i.e. 37 people, in our community have been waiting seven years to be allocated a home under this administration. How does the Hon. Minister rationalise this position with the argument that was in the questions answered by the Chief Minister in the previous question? It just does not simply make sense.

845 **Mr Speaker:** It doesn't, and neither does he, and neither am I allowing it. Next question, please.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, it is a –

850 **Mr Speaker:** There is no question of rationalising one with the other.

Hon. D A Feetham: No, it is a-

Mr Speaker: You can ask a straightforward question about the seven and you get an answer, but we are not debating the whys and wherefores.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker –

Mr Speaker: Yes, go on.

Hon. D A Feetham: – is not the purpose of Question Time not only eliciting information –?

Mr Speaker: The purpose of Question Time in this House goes beyond any House anywhere on the UK model or any of the Overseas Territories. You cannot compare Question Time in this House to what happens anywhere. We have been in the House, on occasion, 10 hours a day and the sole subject on the agenda has been questions. It happens again and again, so what are you complaining about? You have a much bigger slice of the cake at Question Time than in any other parliament. If I am wrong, prove that I am wrong. Bring me evidence to show that I am wrong and that hon. Members in this House are not in a more advantageous position during Question Time than anywhere else. Prove that to me.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker –

Mr Speaker: Now your supplementary.

Hon. D A Feetham: – the purpose of Question Time is, of course, to elicit –

Mr Speaker: Is to elicit information. You do not have to tell me. I can quote you: to elicit information, to press the Government to adopt certain measures and to ask what is Government policy. Those are the three purposes of Question Time.

Hon. D A Feetham: I will proceed with my supplementary and Mr Speaker can rule it out if he thinks that it is out of order.

How does the Government justify the fact that there are over 80 people on the housing waiting list from 2011, when they promised the people of Gibraltar – to those 81 people – in their manifesto that they would be housed within four years? How does the Government justify that, Mr Speaker?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Well, Mr Speaker, unfortunately the answer to that is very simple: because in 2011 there were in excess of 1,400 people on this list. I think it is quite remarkable that we have been able to home and allocate as many people as we have. **(Two Members: Hear, hear, hear.)** *(Banging on desks)*

Hon. D A Feetham: So, Mr Speaker, what the hon. Lady is saying is that when they promised in 2011 that they would house everybody on the waiting list in 2011 and the pre-list within four years, they knew that it was not possible, because – *(Interjection)* Of course it is. By parity of reasoning, that must be so, Mr Speaker.

What I want is for the hon. Lady to show less bluster at the despatch box and for her to explain to these people and provide the comfort that these people require that they will be housed and they are not going to be waiting another eight years to be housed *(Banging on desks)* and more broken promises.

Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo): Well, Mr Speaker, to adopt the tone to which I am replying, (*Laughter*) what I will say to the hon. Gentleman is that I made very clear in the context of debates in this House that we found a list of people waiting for one-bedroom accommodation which was greater than we expected.

905 Indeed, what is also very clear is that people think sometimes that the Government is an estate agent, not a supplier of social housing. What he should ask us is whether any of these 80 have had any offers of allocation, because many, if not most, will have received offers of allocation and refused them. What we have not done is take them off the list even for the purposes of the answer, because if we had taken them off the list for the purposes of the answer
910 the hon. Gentleman might find that he has nothing left to bluster with.

I fully accept that people are entitled, under our system, to three offers of housing. They can say no to the first and they can say no to the second – and they can say no to the third, but then we are under no obligation to continue to offer them anything. But he should know, because he has been in government, that people come and say not ‘I need a one-bedroom,’ but ‘I’d like a
915 one-bedroom in Varyl Begg on the first floor, next to my grandmother at Ramirez Court.’ It happens, he knows it happens and he knows that when you call them up and say, ‘Well, I’ve got something at Gib V on the bottom floor,’ they say, ‘No, no, no. *Yo nada mas que quiero* Varyl Begg.’ That is what we are dealing with, Mr Speaker.

So, our conscience is not just clear, it is fully satisfied that we have done what we said we
920 would do, that those who have not had an allocation are either in very particular circumstances ... some of them uncontactable on some occasions, although they are telling us that they are in Gibraltar, some of them refusing allocations and none of them in the sort of criteria that hon. Gentlemen seemed to be advocating for when they started their questioning on this subject.

925 **Hon. D A Feetham:** Mr Speaker, I do not know what the circumstances of these 81 are. We are not in government; they are in government. They have not provided – (*Interjection*) No, they have not. In the information that they have shared with this House in answer to questions that the hon. Gentleman has asked, no one has provided a breakdown, out of those 81, of how many
930 of those have been made a first offer, a second offer or a third offer, or a breakdown of the circumstances in generic terms that those individuals face.

The Government says that all of them have been offered one or two chances of a property and that they have been refused, but is it not the case that there are ...? I am giving hon. Gentlemen an opportunity, blinded by the fact that I am not in government and I do not have
935 the statistics in front of me but I have long held the view and I am asking the Government whether they agree with this: that there is a gap in the stock in relation to one-bedroom flats and that that is where the Government perhaps, and indeed parties that are going to be contesting the next election, ought to consider – whether to build rental accommodation for those people? Or are they saying that actually that is not a problem in Gibraltar and indeed
940 there are sufficient one-bedroom flats in stock and it is just really that these in 81 individuals – I will confine myself to these 81 individuals because that is the original question – have been offered one-bedroom flats, if that is relevant to them – and I think that the hon. Lady actually alluded to the fact that most of them were seeking one bedroom flats – but actually they have been refused: it is not a question of supply, it is a question that they have refused the offer of
945 allocation?

Hon. Chief Minister: Mr Speaker, I have not said there would be no one on that list, I said the number would be lower, but hon. Members know how allocations work, so I am surprised they have not asked that question. Perhaps they would want to ask that question at the next session
950 of the House.

But let’s be very clear, Mr Speaker: most people who are on the one-bedroom list are there because that is what they are entitled to, but it is not what they want. In other words, very few

people want a one-bedroom. Many of the people on the one-bedroom list as it is today are there because they are waiting to try and buy, not rent, a two-bedroom and they did not – (**Hon. D A Feetham:** From 2011?) Yes, because there might have been people on the list in 2011 who were going away to be students in 2011, but they were on the list and that is what they are waiting for.

Indeed, Mr Speaker, if the hon. Gentleman were privy to the names of people on the list – I do not know why he bothers asking me a question if he is not going to listen to my reply – he would see that they are not names of people, in some instances, who are going to accept the offer of the best one-bedroom that we have in Laguna or Glacis or Varyl Begg or Moorish Castle. They are people who are on the list because they want to buy and they want to buy a two-bedroom. There are people who are on the list because they are fathers who are in those situations which the hon. Gentleman has said they find themselves in, which we agree we need to provide for in a different way, and what they are doing is waiting to buy. They have made other arrangements and they do not want a one-bedroom tenancy because they need something bigger, because they do have children with them. And you have other people who simply are people wanting a pensioner flat of the sort that the hon. Members opposite are telling us are not the ones we need to build in order to resolve the problem. But actually it is.

As usual, Mr Speaker, the Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister sets out helpfully the part of the 2015 manifesto where we specifically dealt with this, setting out that the lists that we had eliminated were the six, five, four, three and two and that the list which we had not been able to deal with was the 1RKB list and setting out how we intended to continue to deal with that. I think that that demonstrates the commitment that we entered into and how we have discharged it.

Hon. Members really do perplex me sometimes because their questioning is sometimes contradictory. One moment they are telling us, ‘The people you haven’t housed are the ones on the one-bedroom list,’ when we are telling them that we are going to build one-bedrooms for pensioners, and the next moment they are telling us to build four bedrooms and five bedrooms. One moment they are telling us to go paperless and the next moment they are telling us (**Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Open an office.) to open an office and not to go paperless.

Mr. Speaker, we can stand here and defend our position until the cows come home or until you stop us from doing so, but our position is not going to change. We are going to continue to take the view that we are doing the right thing in order to rid Gibraltar of its waiting lists and we are not going to play the trick of cutting the waiting list by stopping people from being eligible to be on it, which is what hon. Members would do by introducing means testing and which they tried to do when they were in government by reducing at what age you could come onto the list etc. We will continue to do our best to house the people of Gibraltar as quickly and as adequately as we are able to through affordable housing, through building for pensioners in order to provide more rental stock in that way. We think it is the right thing to do. We think we are delivering.

Q84/2019
Housing waiting list –
Social category A allocations

Clerk: Question 84. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state how many of the 31 people who joined the housing social category A list in 2018 have been allocated homes?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, nine applicants categorised social A in 2018 have been allocated homes. Additionally, 10 applicants have had flats earmarked, which the Housing Department are awaiting to be returned to stock in order to allocate to them, and one has had the social categorisation removed due to a change of circumstances.

Hon. E J Phillips: In respect of the remaining 11, does the Hon. Minister have any visibility on that point?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, they are actively managed by the Housing Department along with all the other demands for allocation.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, in relation to the term 'earmarked for return to stock', when does the Minister envisage that? Is it a slow process?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, it depends on the flat. Obviously when keys are returned to the Housing Department from a former tenant, prospective tenants have the option of either having the flat refurbished for them or taking it on as self-repair. If they have to be refurbished, the turnaround usually takes a maximum of three months, so it will be at some point within the next three months.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, does the hon. Lady have any statistics or ask her Department to compile statistics as to how long it actually takes for somebody on the housing social category A list to be allocated a home?

Again, I am asking the question because I have recently seen a couple of people who are on the housing social A list who have been on that list for a considerable period of time, and it would assuage their concerns if the Minister at least indicated how long it might take for them to be housed, because we are talking about a list that is compiled of the most needy people in the jurisdiction in terms of housing.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, the social list is the most needy in the context of the most needy, because if you were not needy then you would not be on the housing waiting list to begin with. The answer to that depends not just on the circumstances of the individual – and there are different social categorisations – but it has a lot to do with the target property which the applicant requires. There is more stock of particular properties and less stock of others, and whereas there is more stock and there tends to be a quicker turnaround of the 3RKB, it may be slower, for example, in a 4RKB and even slower in the case of the 5RKB. So it is a question of supply and demand and that is how the Department balances the allocation of the flats.

If there is a particular case where the hon. Gentleman thinks someone has a very pressing social need and has been on a social list for an incredibly long period, I invite the hon. Gentleman to advise me privately, obviously, but the Department is very mindful of the social lists and the medical lists when allocating.

As an aside, Mr Speaker, it is actually sometimes remarkable when people are made an offer of allocation on the social list and, as the Chief Minister was saying, turn it down because they do not like the location, the area, the floor – or the colour of the hair of the neighbour's dog. Unfortunately, demands do get to that extreme and people who are on the social waiting list will not be given the option by the Housing Allocation Committee to take another property. It is a question of if your need is that extreme, unless the property is legitimately unsuitable for you because of accessibility characteristics or something that is justifiable, then the offer will be withdrawn and the person will be withdrawn from the social list.

Q85/2019
Unpaid rent arrears –
Amount as at January 2019

Clerk: Question 85. The Hon. E J Phillips.

1050 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Can the Government state the arrears in unpaid rent pertaining to Government rentals as of 23rd January 2019?

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

1055 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, as I have explained to the hon. Gentleman in the past, the balance of arrears is calculated at month end. The balance as at 1st January 2019 is £4,710,372.64.

1060 **Hon. E J Phillips:** As of that date, that represents an increase, in fact, in rental arrears owing to the Government. Does the Minister have an update as to those figures to the present day? She may have them with her, given the fact that we asked this question back in January.

1065 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, traditionally January and February are difficult months and we tend to see a spike because people tend to not pay their rent in the months after Christmas. We saw a spike in January/February, then there was a decrease in March. We have had a spike again this year because of, unfortunately, the combination of various bank holidays over the last couple of weeks and people who come and pay at the counter in person have not come and paid this month. We have had an increase this month which we expect to be paid back next month, so we will see it balance out.

1070 Going back to the previous question, Mr Speaker, that is why the Department wants to encourage people to have payment deducted at source, because then if there are intervening bank holidays when people planned to come and pay their rent and do not come and pay their rent because it is inconvenient because of the bank holiday that week, having automated payments does away with that risk.

1075 The balance as the last month end is £4,737,558.04, but as I said, I queried this figure with the Department and they told me that they had experienced a lot of problems because of the succession of the Easter holidays and the bank holidays and they expect that we will recuperate the difference and will probably have a better balance at the end of this month.

1080 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, whilst I appreciate it is a very difficult task, the figures seem to gravitate around £4.7 million and remain relatively static over the last eight months. Is the Government concerned that some of the enforcement process or the methodology they use to collect these rents is becoming likewise stagnant? And are there any plans to improve the methods or review them to see if they can be improved in terms of their workability?

1085 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that procedures are not stagnant and they are continuously reviewed. What they will be now is escalated to litigation. If the litigation has not yet commenced, then it is certainly about to commence in the next week because I have seen papers being drafted and going backwards and forwards. So people who are in employment and defaulting in the payment of rent can expect to be receiving a claim form very soon.

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Q86/2019
Rent relief for households –
Basis of termination

Clerk: Question 86. The Hon. E J Phillips.

1095 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Can the Government confirm the basis on which rent relief was terminated for households for every month in 2018?

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

1100 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, the schedule is as follows: in January, one deceased, one admitted to elderly residential services; in February, three deceased, one admitted to elderly residential services – these are the reasons why the categorisation has been removed; in March, two were admitted to elderly residential services, two were deceased and one no longer qualified; in April, two deceased, one admitted to elderly residential services; in May, one deceased, one admitted to elderly residential services and two
1105 no longer qualified; in June, three were admitted to elderly residential services; in July, one was deceased, two admitted to elderly residential services, two no longer qualified; someone passed away in August; there were no changes in September; in October, one person failed to renew their application for rent relief; in November, one person was admitted to elderly residential services and one passed away; and in December, one person was admitted to elderly residential
1110 services.

Q87/2019
Pre-housing and housing waiting lists –
Plan for accommodating

Clerk: Question 87. The Hon. E J Phillips.

1115 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, can the Government state how it intends to house over 1,285 people currently on the pre-housing and housing waiting lists?

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

1120 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, a considerable number of people on the waiting lists have applied to purchase at Hassan Centenary Terraces or expressed an interest to buy in the other forthcoming affordable housing schemes. Additionally, we have also announced the construction of rental homes by way of purpose-built accommodation for the elderly.

1125 Once the purchase of all affordable homes is complete in the coming months, we will be in a position to know how many applicants remain on the waiting list and assess the remainder accordingly.

1130 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, it is clear between this side of the House and that side of the House that there is a difference of opinion, that probably will be tested in the General Election, over means testing of Government housing and it is quite clear to those watching this that we believe that social homes should be provided to the most needy in our community. But insofar as the 1,285 people – and I take the point the Chief Minister made in response to earlier questions on the Order Paper, that many of the people on this list, it is suggested, are waiting for

Government affordable homes – would it not make sense, when we are dealing with social housing, to separate the two lists into those that ...? My understanding from the Chief Minister's responses in the other questions is that this list encompasses and includes those people looking for affordable homes. Wouldn't it make sense then, when we are dealing with social housing for the most needy in our community, that that is separated from the list in relation to those that are seeking affordable housing? I just think it makes sense. I know that my learned hon. Friend Mr Feetham made the point in questioning today and I would encourage the Government to adopt that position.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, I am not sure whether that was a supplementary question or a statement, but in order to clarify for the hon. Gentleman, internally it is. What we are not going to do is deny someone the right of being on the waiting list, but it may well be that that person has either submitted an application to purchase or expressed an interest to purchase or tells us, 'I just want to be on the waiting list to purchase.' We have, within the wider list internally. Then we can separate both.

So, when it comes to allocation, someone may be at the top of the list and may receive the call and say, 'Well, actually, I do not want the flat that you are offering – leave me on the list because I do not want to lose my position on the list, but just call me when the next development for affordable housing is available.' Mr Speaker, the importance of this is we need some kind of order when we are then proceeding to contact people for the purchase of the affordable housing and we go by the order in which they appear on the list. People may want to be on the list and they are accumulating points for the time that they are on the list.

The point that I want to make is that we will continue to construct affordable housing and, in our experience, people who can afford to buy affordable housing will not aspire to rent as an alternative. People want to be on the waiting list so that they are in the system to have priority when their opportunity to purchase in the affordable housing schemes arises.

Hon. E J Phillips: I note from the answer to that question that the Government is looking for order in the system. I certainly would argue that there is a lack of order in the system that is being encouraged here insofar as the fusion of the list and then identifying those for affordable ...

Wouldn't the Minister agree that means testing would solve this problem when carving out individuals who can afford affordable homes and those who cannot? Clearly means testing is designed to meet the needs of a community and also meet the needs of those who would like to aspire to affordable homes who can afford that extra bit every month to get a mortgage and buy on the 50/50 scheme, or whatever percentage it is that is proposed by the Government. Would it not make sense to reconsider the Government's position on the question of means testing and adopt that policy? I put it to the Minister whether she would reconsider the Government's position in respect of means testing for Government housing.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: No, Mr Speaker.

Hon. D A Feetham: Mr Speaker, just returning to the answer that has just been given, it appeared to say that the way that the Government essentially decides to allocate affordable homes is to go through the housing waiting list and identify the people at the top of the housing waiting list, and those appear to be prioritised over people at the bottom of the housing waiting list. Doesn't that –?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: On the same list.

Hon. D A Feetham: On the same list, yes. Doesn't that encourage more people to go onto the housing waiting list? And couldn't the Government explore the possibility of decoupling the

1185 question of somebody wanting to buy an affordable home from having to go onto the housing waiting list? Otherwise, you are always going to get the situation whereby there are going to be hundreds and hundreds of people on the housing waiting list.

1190 **Hon. Miss S J Sacramento:** Mr Speaker, I already said, two supplementary questions ago, that we do have this internal distinction.

Q88/2019

**Bishop Canilla House –
Completion of refurbishment works**

Clerk: Question 88. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state that the refurbishment to Bishop Canilla will be completed by February 2019?

1195 I appreciate this question is now ... part of it is redundant, but if we can have an update in relation to that, it would be appreciated.

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

1200 **Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento):** Mr Speaker, the main elements of the works forming part of the external refurbishment of Bishop Canilla House are on track to be completed by June 2019.

1205 A short extension of time was required due to delays caused by adverse weather conditions and there was a necessary reprogramming of works due to eventualities which have come about as a result of the poor condition of the roof and other substandard building elements and unforeseen problems which were discovered during the course of the refurbishment. This, coupled with the fact that the building is a senior citizen residential block, has complicated the refurbishment further.

1210 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Can the Minister confirm what measures are going to be put in place to avoid again the same difficulties that we had last year insofar as heat for our elderly? Many of them have experienced problems insofar as the works surrounding them are obviously very inconvenient for them. Many of them still come back to us asking questions about when this will be finished, and I am grateful for the response to June but what matters are being put in place in order to avoid a reoccurrence of the same complaints that we may receive this year when the weather temperatures increase?

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Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, it is unlikely that we will have the same issues that we had last summer because we have progressed a year since then, so now it is a question of finalising the refurbishment, which I very much hope will be ready for June. It is just that there was an unforeseen issue with the condition of the roof that was discovered recently as part of the refurbishment and it was actually worse than anybody expected. It was conditions which could not be foreseen at the time of the initial survey for the works and that is what has brought us back slightly, but we are coming to the end of the work so hopefully it is now the final stretch and we should be seeing progress in the completion. I have certainly asked the contractors and everybody involved in the management of the refurbishment work that they ensure that they can complete everything that can be compartmentalised so that progress can be made and there is as little inconvenience as possible, because it is regrettable that we have found

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ourselves in the situation that we have found ourselves in, in the block where our residents are elderly.

Hon. D A Feetham: Well, Mr Speaker, that will be a great comfort to the elderly residents of that particular block. Indeed, as my hon. Friend has said, a number of them have come to see me. I have had reason to help them to draft letters, at least two to the Hon. Minister. I have also been down there and I have spoken to people there and indeed to workers who have been there.

I am sufficiently long in the tooth not to believe everything that I am told, but one of the issues that certainly was brought to my attention as having contributed to the problem was the payment of subcontractors – that the main contractor had been paid, that contractor had paid one of the subcontractors but it had not fed down the contractual chain and that had caused a problem with people from those subcontractors basically going to work, because of course they had not been paid. Is there any truth in that rumour? And if there is an element of truth, what measures are being taken in order to ensure that that does not happen again?

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, the situation is not as the hon. Gentleman describes it, but what happened unfortunately a few months ago was that one of the subcontractors of the subcontractor, as a company, dissolved. That caused a delay of about a month. The subcontractor's subcontractor left, and that caused a delay but our subcontractor has met all the financial liabilities so that there is not an issue in terms of any further delay on account of the finances.

Going back to the hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition's previous question in relation to the summer months, in relation to the balconies and the windows these have all been completed and they can already be opened, so that should not be an issue this summer at all and is not an issue now anymore.

Q89/2019

New Government affordable housing schemes – Date for commencement

Clerk: Question 89. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government confirm when allocations of the new Government affordable housing schemes will commence?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the sale of Hassan Centenary Terraces has already commenced.

Q90/2019

Domestic violence – Scope of protections

Clerk: Question 90. The Hon. E J Phillips.

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, can the Government state that it will bring a Bill to widen the scope of domestic violence protections to non-physical and economic abuse?

Clerk: Answer, the Minister for Housing and Equality.

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Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the Government is already considering widening the scope of domestic violence to non-physical and economic abuse as part of our National Strategy on Domestic Abuse.

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Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, this is an area on which I have asked the Government a number of questions previously and I believe in the Budget last year the Hon. Minister said it is important to continue to raise awareness of domestic abuse and it is important to work collectively and to end all forms of violence against women and girls. Every single Member of this House will agree, of course, with that statement, or every Member of this House should agree with.

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Mr Speaker, insofar as the question is concerned, it is a year on, nearly, and I know that the national strategy in respect of domestic violence is to meet all those concerned, to meet particularly the RGP, who have also raised this issue quite publicly in newspapers and of course domestic violence organisations also continue to raise this issue with the Minister. Is the Minister in any way going to share with us a timeline in respect of this important piece of legislation that protects women and girls and indeed others – and men – from domestic violence? There have been many issues, of course, in several jurisdictions about domestic violence attributed to men, women and children, and therefore I would ask the Minister if she can give some clarity as to when it will propose to bring these new laws to our community, given the fact that we are now trailing fairly behind the UK position.

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Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, I do not accept the statement that we are trailing behind the UK position. We are working on numerous initiatives in relation to the prevention of domestic abuse, not just the legislation, because the legislation of course is an important framework that gives us protection but there are lots of other things that are necessary and that are in the pipeline and that we are continuously working on.

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This is something that I established six years ago, I think, and it is something that has been evolving remarkably since then. It is something that we keep under continuous review. Insofar as the drafting of legislation, that is something that is in the pipeline and will be made available to us as soon as it possibly can be. Surely it is something that needs to happen in the forthcoming months. I am keen to ensure that we wrap up and formalise anything that continues to be remaining in relation to the prevention of domestic abuse.

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A lot of work has been done and I think it is important that we communicate and we showcase and continue to remind people of the good work that we have done, particularly in relation to awareness campaigns. I work very closely with the principal organisations that are there to help and support the victims of domestic abuse – as well as, importantly, the perpetrators – and I have regular meetings with the Commissioner of Police on the subject as well as with the Chief Executive of the Care Agency, and it is something that I can assure the hon. Gentleman, and everybody indeed, that we are continuously progressing. Rest assured, Mr Speaker, that we have a number of announcements in relation to domestic abuse coming up very shortly.

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Hon. E J Phillips: The only reason why I have raised this question at this level is because of comments made in the media by organisations that are closely related to domestic violence who believe that domestic violence in our community is rife.

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Given the developments in the United Kingdom in relation to the legislation that underpins the protections for people who are the victims of domestic violence, and the call in fact by the Commissioner in respect of that underpinning legislation, and given the fact that the Minister of

her own admission has suggested that we have been looking at this for six years, I would have thought, given that the Budget speech of last year would have pushed that a little in terms of timing ... and I know that the Hon. Minister will not commit to a timeframe now, but I think it is important to remind the Government that this is a very significant area of legislation that needs to be dealt with as soon as possible.

Q91/2019

**Vacated Government dwellings –
Average turnaround time**

Clerk: Question 91. The Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: What is the average turnaround time of a Government dwelling between the time that it is vacated and the time that the keys are handed over to a new tenant?

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

Minister for Housing and Equality (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, the average turnaround of a Government dwelling between the time it is vacated and the keys are handed over to a new tenant can vary. This is due to the condition of the flat. Some may only require a change of locks and cleaning of the property and others may require extensive refurbishment or may be connected to external factors such as a new roof.

After an extensive review of systems, the Housing Department now aims to achieve a turnaround in three months, though this target is not always possible.

Hon. Ms M D Hassan Nahon: Mr Speaker, constituents who come to see me are frustratingly reporting delays of more than three months and even years, so my question is: could anything be done to expedite what seems to be too long a wait when people are literally waiting on family couches to have housing? We do know that Government can expedite things when they want to.

Hon. Miss S J Sacramento: Mr Speaker, I do not quite understand the supplementary and I really fail to understand the comment at the end. The current Government would want to expedite everything as much as possible in every possible way.

I am not sure whether the hon. Lady refers to people who are waiting for refurbishment or people who are waiting for the allocation of a home generally. Certainly I am not aware of a refurbishment taking over a year at all, let alone years, so if there is ...

I have been extremely strict – and this is one of the things that I think has been a complete overhaul of the Housing Department, in that I have been very strict in the introduction of the collection of statistics and the management of the performance of our data and I have, I think probably for the first time ever in our Housing Department, introduced KPIs. I think I do not say the words ‘statistics’, ‘data’ and ‘KPIs’ often enough. It is probably the first thing I say when I walk in the door and the last thing as a leave.

As a result of this very strict management – and it has taken us a couple of years to be able to introduce new systems and new mechanisms – certainly the target is that the turnaround for a refurbishment is three months. That, years ago, was unheard of. I do accept that years ago the refurbishment of a Government flat, before our time, took over a year and sometimes up to two years, and they sometimes were not refurbished at all, but I certainly cannot accept that that is the situation today.

1365 If the hon. Lady has a constituent who says that they are awaiting a flat because it is in
refurbishment for over three months, then I would ask her to contact me and I will look into it,
but that is, certainly from my review of the data, not something that is common practice unless
there is major construction work that is required, like rebuilding ducts or having to replace a
1370 roof. Certainly my Department, the Housing Department, the Housing Works Agency and our
subcontractors are very closely managed to ensure we achieve these targets.

Standing Order 7(1) suspended to proceed with Government Bills

Clerk: Suspension of Standing Orders. 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 Government Bills.

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Mr Speaker: Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

BILLS

FIRST AND SECOND READING

**European Union Laws (Voluntary Implementation) Bill 2019 –
First Reading approved**

Clerk: Bills – First and Second Reading.

1380 A Bill for an Act for the voluntary implementation of European Union laws after the Treaty on
European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Treaty establishing
the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Area Agreement cease to
apply to Gibraltar; and to provide such transitional or other provisions as are deemed necessary,
and for connected purposes.

The Hon. the Deputy Chief Minister.

1385 **Deputy Chief Minister (Hon. Dr J J Garcia):** Mr Speaker, I have the honour to move that a Bill
for an Act to provide for the voluntary implementation of European Union laws after the Treaty
on European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the Treaty
establishing the European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Area
Agreement cease to apply to Gibraltar; and to provide such transitional or other provisions as
1390 are deemed necessary, and for connected purposes be read a first time.

Mr Speaker: I now put the question, which is that a Bill for an Act to provide for the voluntary
implementation of European Union laws after the Treaty on European Union, the Treaty on the
Functioning of the European Union, the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy
1395 Community and the European Economic Area Agreement cease to apply to Gibraltar; and to
provide such transitional or other provisions as are deemed necessary, and for connected
purposes be read a first time. Those in favour? (**Members:** Aye.) Those against? Carried.

Clerk: The European Union Laws (Voluntary Implementation) Act 2019.

1400 **Chief Minister (Hon. F R Picardo):** Mr Speaker, I move that the House should now adjourn to Thursday, 30th May at three o'clock in the afternoon, which will be after European parliamentary elections have been held, allowing the Clerk and the staff of this House to do the work they need to do in respect of Gibraltar's participation in those elections.

1405 Before the House rises, I am sure I join all Members of the House in saying that we all very much welcome that there would be a European parliamentary election, and in thanking in anticipation the Clerk and all members of your staff who have been responsible for ensuring that Gibraltar is able to participate in those elections. The circumstances in which we are going to vote have been visited upon us late and that has required that Mr Martinez and his staff have worked harder than they are usually required to work and in a shorter time window to ensure
1410 that Gibraltar is able to comply with all its obligations and the United Kingdom and Gibraltar legislation and European rules in the participation of the people of Gibraltar and all those eligible to vote in Gibraltar in those European elections.

I move that the House should now adjourn.

1415 **Mr Speaker:** The House will now adjourn to Thursday, 30th May at three in the afternoon.

The House adjourned at 5.02 p.m.