



PROCEEDINGS OF THE GIBRALTAR PARLIAMENT

AFTERNOON SESSION: 4.15 p.m. – 8.25 p.m.

Gibraltar, Wednesday, 21st July 2021

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The Gibraltar Parliament

The Parliament met at 4.15 p.m.

[MR SPEAKER: Hon. M L Farrell BEM GMD RD JP *in the Chair*]

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

Appropriation Bill 2021 – Second Reading – Debate continued

Mr Speaker: The Hon. Roy Clinton.

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

5 Today is the first day, since the surreal COVID-19 Emergency Budget that we had on 20th March 2020, that we can revert to some semblance of normality in how the annual Appropriation Bill debate is conducted.

10 In hindsight I do not think this Parliament could or should have done anything materially different in the way the crisis was tackled from a financial standpoint. I welcome the way the COVID-19 Response Fund was created and indeed is properly reflected in the Estimates Book 2021/2022 and I wish to personally thank the Chief Minister and the Financial Secretary for listening to us and taking on board some of our suggestions as to how the COVID-19 Response Fund should be published on a quarterly basis and accounted for in the Estimates Book.

15 The IMF's advice to governments in 2020 on tackling COVID-19 was to do whatever it takes but keep the receipts. In due course the Principal Auditor will, of course, conduct an audit of the COVID-19 Response Fund and produce his report. Although it is a two-year outturn period that appears in the Estimates Books, as the Chief Minister has already explained, it will be clear to readers of the Estimates Book that no netting off has occurred, and the full effect of the support from the COVID-19 Response Fund can be clearly seen by line item in Appendix S of the Estimates Book. However, Mr Speaker, regretfully, all that I have said in previous Budgets about the inadequate way our public finances are reported and structured and the relevant failings in the Budget process remain entirely the same, and in that respect nothing has improved. We still have no visibility of the state of Government-owned companies, indirect debt is not recognised, we now have three years' Supplementary Appropriation Bills outstanding, we have no proper Finance Bill – more of which I will say later, and the last report of the Principal Auditor was for financial year 2015-16. We have no Public Accounts Committee and the cumulative result is that this Parliament cannot exercise any effective financial scrutiny over the executive or the Government, and so I still cannot support a half-view Budget and will not vote for it, no matter what screams – and no doubt there will be screams – of the need for solidarity, the new word that we hear again and again, that will come from the Government benches.

25 Although COVID-19 has undeniably cost this community £227 million to 31st March 2021, and as will be published tomorrow, a further £25 million for the three months to 30th June 2021, and our revenues are down, it only serves to highlight how this Government has previously mismanaged our public finances and continues to do so despite the Chief Minister's May Day Message and pledge to hunt down waste and abuse. Regretfully I can only describe this Budget and the Estimates Book for 2021-22 as 'the begging bowl Budget' – begging bowl in that this

Government now has to beg, borrow and scrape to try to balance the books that are shown to us today, even if only in half of the year. So, let's see now how this Government is attempting to beg, borrow and scrape its way out of the financial hole it is in.

40 Turning to begging, this Government has in the past spent – and I use the word liberally – lavishly on brand new sporting facilities with the gross costs reported, as far as I can establish, as follows: the Europa Sports Stadium and facilities, around £37.5 million; the Lathbury Sports Complex, still not finished, about £28.9 million to complete; the rifle shooting range, another £7 million. This all totals around about £73.4 million at my best guess.

45 I was delighted to read the Government's press release on 22nd June this year announcing plans for the building of a National Theatre. The performing arts, compared to sports, have long been overlooked by this Government despite its repeated manifesto promises. This delight was short lived because I then found out that the cost of this theatre was to be met by begging from the general public and generous private donors. Yes, Mr Speaker, begging. To announce the
50 creation of a foundation to spearhead the fundraising campaign as some great event was truly Orwellian given the way this Government has spent on previous capital projects with no regard to affordability or balance. It is worth quoting directly from the glossy project plan – a very nice, glossy prospectus which the Government has produced, no doubt to send to all those donors who will dish out the millions to produce the project that they said they were going to do. It is really
55 quite remarkable. On the front page ... these are comments from the Minister's foreword at the bottom. It is quite remarkable. He says:

Government at this point of time cannot commit the amount of funding that this project will require to achieve the standard that Gibraltar will expect.

I had to read this twice because when you translate it, roughly what it means is, 'I know I promised to buy you lunch, but I cannot afford to buy you a lunch that would be worthy of you.' The free lunches are indeed over.

60 This Government needs to stick to its budgets. The Minister for Culture and Environment, who unfortunately is not with us at the moment, in one breath says he needs to raise £½ million from donors to fund the next stages of the design process for the theatre project, and yet in another he just shrugs his shoulders and says, 'Oh, by the way, the Midtown Park project will be £1.3 million over budget.' What is the point of having a budget if you are going to be £1.3 million
65 over? And how can he now go to private donors and say, 'Look, I haven't got any money – can you please lend me half a million quid for a design project?' It is just nonsense.

Remarkably, yesterday the Chief Minister saved the Minister for the Environment's skin, quite literally, by announcing, by surprise:

the new park at Midtown is being funded entirely by a very generous donation from Trusted Novus Bank. There will be no cost to the taxpayer. This donation of the entire costs of the development of the park is a gift to all of the people of Gibraltar by the board and shareholder of Trusted Novus Bank.

70 A very generous donation indeed because in the Estimates Book for 2021-22 the Improvement and Development Fund shows that an amount of around £3.9 million has been expended on the 'construction of central park' and there is an additional £100,000 estimated in 2021-22 expenditure estimates to completion. And so what we have is a very generous £4 million donation by Trusted Novus Bank and of course this will be a windfall to Government revenues in 2021-22. I wonder if the Chief Minister in his reply would be kind enough to say who identified the Midtown
75 Park as the worthy beneficiary of such generosity – or was it that the begging bowl was already out? (*Interjection*)

The 2009 Music Festival came in at a record £3 million over budget and since its inception it has lost £16 million. Surely that would have gone a long way to pay for a theatre. The free lunches and the lavish parties are indeed over, and now we have to beg for projects that this community
80 legitimately deserves and expects.

We heard yesterday from the Deputy Chief Minister that the Parasol Foundation was very generously earmarking £1 million for the refurbishment of the Mount. The Government fundraising machine is surely on overdrive: £5 million in pledges already and counting. They really put the GBC Open Day to shame.

85 I regret to say this, but the begging bowl is also out for this very building. Having spent £885,000 for the Piazza cafeterias, the Government now says it cannot afford the repairs and refurbishment, but it has been offered another very kind contribution by the Parasol Foundation for the external refurbishment of the building. Has this Government no shame? Westminster is currently facing a hugely expensive refurbishment programme, but it would know better than to have it partly paid
90 by private donation. If we cannot afford to do it, we should not do it. I do take objection to seeing the design statement complete with the private donor's logo on it. This is our Parliament, it is our building. (**A Member:** Shame!) Shame! It cannot be that the seat of Government is propped up by private donors; it just does not look right. If we cannot afford it now, then we should not do it. As the Deputy Chief Minister pointed out yesterday, there is nothing in the Estimates to actually
95 provide for any refurbishments. In fact, it is just as well that there is no flat above No. 6 that requires urgent refurbishment.

And yet for other projects close to the Government's heart, such as the Victoria Keys development, money is no object. It grows on trees. The Government has put out tenders for moving the Eastside rubble mountain and also for building an extension to the Coaling Island jetty,
100 all at the cost of the taxpayer. So, we have a begging bowl in one hand for public benefit projects and a huge, heavy pot of gold for a select group of private sector developers. It is nonsense. The Government cannot be allowed to go begging for money for projects it should have built and then provide money to developers in the private sector. This is his brand of socialism. It is a very strange brand of socialism and is yet another symptom of the historic mismanagement and misdirection
105 of our public finances.

Let's turn from the begging bowl to borrowing in its many forms. Mr Speaker, the nature and level of this Government's borrowing is, to put it mildly, significant, and I must therefore beg your indulgence because I need to spend some time on the matter.

I normally talk in terms of direct and indirect cash borrowing, but this year I need to add a new
110 category, and that is the borrowing of assets. Let's consider first the easier to understand, which is the direct and indirect cash borrowing. On the direct cash borrowing the Chief Minister has already indicated that the projected Consolidated Fund outturn for the two years ended 31st March 2021 is a net loss of £138 million, and indeed he projects a net loss of £50.7 million for the year ended 31st March 2022.

115 I need to talk a bit about our income and expenditure, as Sir Joe has done, so that we understand the levels of direct borrowing. Our recurrent revenue is no longer covering recurrent expenditure – I am probably now stating the obvious – such that for the two years ended 31st March 2021 our costs are now 11% greater than our revenues, thus Sir Joe's gold rule of not borrowing to cover recurrent expenditure has necessarily had to be broken. This is before taking
120 into account the assistance of the COVID-19 Response Fund that has re-credited the Consolidated Fund with £158 million in respect of lost revenue, the main areas that have lost revenue being £74.4 million in respect of import duty, £48.5 million in respect of company tax and £16.6 million of income tax. The direct incurred costs of COVID-19 amounts to £64 million in the same period and when you add this together with the revenue loss of £158 million it will give you the COVID-
125 19 Response Fund expenditure number of £227 million to 31st March 2021 as per Appendix S.

The Consolidated Fund in pure cash terms has paid out £256 million net and this has necessitated the borrowing of £250 million, without which the fund would have been overdrawn by £131 million as at 31st March 2021. And so, when you look at the Consolidated Fund as a pure cash in and out sort of bank statement, the Consolidated Fund in pure cash terms has paid out
130 £256 million in the two-year period and this has necessitated the borrowing of £250 million, without which the fund would have had to be overdrawn by £131 million at 31st March 2021.

135 The Government's gross direct debt position as at 31st March 2019 – well before COVID – was £447.7 million and this was made up by £247.7 million of debentures that were issued to the Gibraltar Savings Bank and £200 million of bank debt, which was due £150 million to Barclays Bank and £50 million to NatWest RBSI. As at 31st March 2021 the Government's gross direct debt position is now £697.7 million – i.e. £250 million higher, as expected – and this is now represented by £372.7 million of debentures issued to the Gibraltar Savings Bank and £325 million of bank debt, which is now due £150 million to the Gibraltar International Bank, £75 million to NatWest RBSI under existing five-year facilities and £100 million to NatWest RBSI under the UK £500 million guarantee scheme. These numbers are as at 31st March this year.

140 As regards the £325 million bank debt, of this, £150 million is repayable to the Gibraltar International Bank within one year, all borrowing under the £500 million UK guarantee has to be repaid with three years – i.e. by 3rd December 2023 – and the pre-COVID facility with NatWest for £75 million expires on 31st March 2025.

145 The estimates for next year show that it is anticipated that a further £50 million of borrowing will be required this year ending 31st March 2022, which will bring the total gross direct borrowing to £747.7 million, and indeed we were told yesterday that the Government has already drawn that further £50 million.

150 Looking ahead to 2021-22 we are told to expect a deficit of £50.7 million in the Consolidated Fund and revenues will still be short of normal levels by £55 million. Recurrent expenditure will exceed recurrent revenue by 8%. The Father of the House has already indicated that it will take some time for revenue to recover; it is not going to happen in one year, it may not happen in two years, it may not happen in three years – it will take some time. I do not see in these figures and I have not heard from the Chief Minister or indeed from Sir Joe any actual plan for the repayment of our increasing direct debt levels, nor the management of recurrent expenditure, other than to identify and eliminate waste and increase efficiency.

155 In the last normal Budget in 2019 – I say 'normal' in the sense of 'before COVID' – the forecast estimate for total Consolidated Fund recurrent expenditure for 2019-20 was £676.4 million. The estimate for recurrent expenditure in 2021-22 is £684.2 million excluding any exceptional contribution to the COVID-19 Response Fund.

160 As Sir Joe has pointed out, recurrent expenditure does not decrease if we have a drop in recurrent revenue; we still need to pay to maintain our health and education systems and other services. What is evident is that the Government's only plan at the moment is to resort to further borrowing to pay for these services, unless it has in its mind an intention to further increase taxation in the future.

165 The Government knows it has access to reserves of at least £50 million of surpluses held in the Savings Bank and again I would urge it to abandon its empty political rhetoric in manifesto politics and use those reserves that belong to it, i.e. the people, rather than increase third-party borrowing, as it seems intent on doing. Why borrow £50 million when you have £50 million in your right pocket? Surely the sensible thing to do is use that rainy day fund. As it is available to it, it can do it now. If these are indeed rainy day funds then now is the time to use them, and I can tell Sir Joe now I will not criticise him or the Government for using them because –

175 **Hon. Sir J J Bossano:** Don't worry it is not going to happen.

Hon. R M Clinton: But why not? It is your rainy day fund. It is our rainy day fund. Why borrow £50 million from a bank when you have £50 million sitting in the drawer? It makes no sense and it is just political nonsense. He has my guarantee that I will not say a word if he uses it. I will, in fact, congratulate him.

180 **Hon. Chief Minister:** You won't say a word from now? If you will sit down and you will not say another word, I might be tempted to persuade him!

Hon. R M Clinton: Well, persuade him first and then maybe I will sit down! *(Laughter)*

185 Mr Speaker, talking about real sinking funds, I note that the Sinking Fund at 31st March 2021
was £20 million, such that the aggregate – i.e. the gross minus the Sinking Fund – public debt is
£677.7 million. With the projected increase in borrowing of £50 million I expect total gross debt
before Sinking Fund to be £747.7 million at 31st March 2022, as is reflected in the Estimates Book,
and yet aggregate public debt – i.e. after the Sinking Fund – is reported lower, at £672.2 million,
190 which implies that there is an increase in the Sinking Fund to £75.5 million. I would appreciate if
the Chief Minister in his reply would explain where this extra £55.5 million in the Sinking Fund is
expected to come from, as it is really not evident from the information in the Estimates Book. On
the one hand gross debt is going up, and on the other hand aggregate debt goes down. Where is
the difference? I would be grateful if the Chief Minister would explain where he expects to get
195 £55.5 million, if not perhaps from the Savings Bank.

We only have a one-year projection in front of us, and that shows a deficit of £50.7 million to
31st March 2022. Even if the Government manages to break even by March 2023 it is still unclear
in these estimates as to how it intends to repay the amounts borrowed under the UK guarantee
facility that expires in December 2023. Or is it that we will have a General Election in between and
200 it will be somebody else's problem? By that time I suspect that the amount borrowed will probably
be of the order of £300 million of the £500 million facility. Given this scenario and the interests of
Gibraltar PLC, I would advise the Government to seek an extension to the duration of the
£500 million facility to a longer period, not of three years but of at least 10 years, so we can put
in place a scheduled debt management plan and at least give a decent chance to Sir Joe's National
205 Economic Plan, which I do not think he will see producing returns within a year.

Whereas in the Emergency Budget of March 2020 I did confirm that the Government had
existing headroom under its borrowing powers for an additional £500 million of debt, I did not of
course suggest that it borrow a full £500 million. Indeed, as our borrowing limits are defined as a
maximum of 40% of GDP, I would urge caution as GDP is already, as announced yesterday, forecast
210 for 2020-21 as £2.44 billion, which shows a reduction of 4.9% on the previous period. I
acknowledge what Sir Joe has said, that this is not as bad as the UK's –10% GDP, but given we
have a small economy it has to be taken in that context. Our direct gross debt has thus grown by
£250 million to £697.7 million, as I have outlined, but I remain very concerned as to how we are
going to repay this and any future requirements.

215 We heard yesterday that the Government had already borrowed that £50 million for 2021-22,
so as at today, as far as I am aware, our direct gross debt is £747.7 million – I am happy to be
corrected if I am wrong – and the debt limit, based on 40% of last estimated GDP, would be
£976 million. So, on these numbers, the Government is already at 76.6% of the absolute direct
debt legal limit.

220 Let's now turn to indirect debt. Each year I try – and I use the word 'try' with reason because I
cannot know for certain – to quantify the indirect gross debt, which I would define as being
moneys borrowed through Government companies, and this year I have the following list: Credit
Finance, £400 million borrowed from the Savings Bank; GCP Investments Ltd, £16 million
borrowed from Gibraltar International Bank secured on Government property; ES Ltd, £78 million,
225 Lombard PLC, secured on the power station; Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd, £300 million, loan notes
secured on the six housing estates by way of mortgage; Eruca Investments Ltd, £165 million in
some fancy structured finance on the 50-50 affordable housing. This adds up to a gross amount
of £959 million in addition to the official gross debt of £697.7 million as at 31st March 2021. If you
add those two numbers together it will take you to a total gross debt position of, rounded up,
230 £1.7 billion, or, if you want the broken down number, £1,656.7 million at 31st March 2021, as
compared to £1.2 billion as at 31st March 2019 – and if I give you the full number it will be
£1,241.7 million.

The Leader of the Opposition was quite astute and quick to pick up on the following confession
from the Chief Minister yesterday when he said – and I am afraid I cannot imitate his voice as well
235 as Sir Joe does Caruana:

if we had all Government company borrowing as direct borrowing of the Government we may have exceeded the 40% to GDP limit provided for

This is an open admission that the company borrowing is, in fact, and has always been Government borrowing but structured off the books in an indirect way – a confession, Mr Speaker. He then has the audacity to say – just to compound his guilt – in respect of my historic assertions that this was always Government debt:

we were lucky that we never took his advice on the matter of Government company borrowings,

240 That is what he said, Mr Speaker, because he knows that if the Government had done so ... It is not a matter of *if* they would have exceeded the 40% to GDP ratio, but at a limit of £976 million the Government *would* have exceeded the legal limit by, on my estimate, £680.7 million. Yes, they would have broken the limit by £680.7 million and what is astounding is that the Chief Minister seems almost proud of defeating our borrowing power limits by the use of indirect Government
245 company borrowing. We might as well shred the Public Finance (Borrowing Powers) Act 2008 because it simply does not bind the Government's ability to borrow. This Chief Minister is proud of the fact he has defeated the powers of an Act of this Parliament.

Of this amount of £1,657.7 billion only £250 million, or shall we say 15% of it, can be attributable to the COVID-19 response. The remainder of this debt mountain is a monument to
250 this Government's inability to control its thirst for unsustainable spending without regard for future generations. (**A Member:** Hear, hear.) We do not know where the money is coming from. We do not know where he gets the money to pay the housing allowance, which is around £11 million in 2020, to Gibraltar Capital Assets Ltd to service the £300 million mortgage. Is this funding stable? And, if not, how will the money be made up? He boasted on public television and
255 said, 'Well, look, it's only half of the revenue from a certain commodity that I get every month.' Is that still true? Has he still got that revenue? How is he going to pay for this? Where is the money coming from? I cannot tell you, Mr Speaker, and I cannot tell the public because he will not tell us.

Without the UK Government's guarantee it is highly unlikely that any third-party bank would
260 be willing to lend any further money to the Government without significant security. Indeed, the expiry of the £150 million facility with Barclays could only be replaced by £25 million from NatWest, who would not take any more, and the remaining £125 million had to be obtained by going to Sir Joe and issuing debentures to the Gibraltar Savings Bank to take up the difference. Indeed, as at 31st March 2021 I calculate that 67% of the Savings Bank's assets are invested in
265 Government debt or Government-owned or controlled companies. The Savings Bank – Sir Joe – has become the Government's lender of last resort.

Yesterday the Chief Minister claimed he had a bank or banks willing to lend the Government £500 million without the need of a UK sovereign guarantee. Perhaps in his reply he could indicate the rate that would be charged, the term and any other security that would have been required
270 for such lending to support his claim that –

Hon. Chief Minister: I would be delighted.

Hon. R M Clinton: – and I quote:

when the banks have X-rayed our economy and our public finances they have considered our public finances and our economy strong enough to lend us £½ billion.

275 Well, Mr Speaker, that is quite a boast and I would be delighted to hear if he can provide us with all the information in that.

Hon. Chief Minister: I would be delighted to in my reply.

280 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Excellent, because certainly that is not the view that Barclays Bank had, who did not renew the £150 million unsecured facility.

Hon. Chief Minister: How do you know they did not renew it?

285 **Hon. R M Clinton:** So, Mr Speaker –

Hon. Chief Minister: How do you know that they did not renew it?

290 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Well, because I have asked questions in this House as to the breakdown of debt and the name does not appear.

Hon. Chief Minister: Yes, all you know is they are not renewing the debt but with them not that there is not an offer to renew. That is your problem. All you know is that.

295 **Hon. R M Clinton:** May I continue, Mr Speaker? (**Mr Speaker:** Yes.) Thank you.

There is only so much the Savings Bank can do to help finance the Government, and in the absence of any other lenders – although perhaps the Chief Minister will enlighten us – the Government is now embarking on a new way of financing in what I would describe as asset borrowing. Asset borrowing is really renting. Rather than borrow to spend money on capital projects, or indeed spend its own money, which it no longer has, the Government's new preferred method appears to be to borrow or rent the assets. Invariably this will come at a higher long-term cost to the public purse. I will give the example of some specific buildings and equipment as follows.

300 This new trend of renting buildings has commenced with the move of GBC to new premises at South Jumpers Bastion. The Government announced some time ago that the building will be rented for – although the numbers may have changed since then – £300,000 per annum with an option to purchase for £7.5 million.

305 Following on from that we heard about a brand new St Mary's School, but again the building will be rented from a private developer. This is what we were told in answer to Question 245/2019 on 19th December 2019. They said, in answer to the question, that the rent would be:

£29.75 per square foot ... We also successfully negotiated an option for the developer to fit out the school at an additional rental cost of £4 per square foot

310 – so now they are actually renting the school equipment as well as the building –

or pay the developer the capital contribution in respect of those fitting-out costs. We then secured a right to buy an option to buy the property at defined intervals, which is based on a 4% per year yield at year 14 and a 6% yield at year 21 and every seventh anniversary thereafter, and that is assuming an RPI of 2.5%.

Not a bad investment proposition, Mr Speaker.

315 Again, the Government is incurring a rental cost with an option to purchase, with an attractive inbuilt yield for the developer, but of course the more the developer makes the more it costs the taxpayer. On the one hand we have Sir Joe worrying about recurrent expenditure and on the other hand we have a Chief Minister increasing recurrent expenditure. This methodology, it would appear, is going to be applied also for Sir Joe's modular construction projects, being the Rooke Nursing home and the Workers' Hostel at Eastern Beach. We will see a developer own the building who will enjoy a guaranteed rent from the Government.

320 This is a thinly disguised way of borrowing money by way of paying long-term rentals for the building with invariably an option to purchase, because no one will suggest that the Government would ever give up the usage of a school. It is unlikely that the Government would turn to the

private sector for a school and a nursing home in this way if it could raise or had the money itself. This is another way of borrowing.

325 The renting of equipment on a longer-term basis appears to be a new policy of this
Government, again to avoid capital expenditure which it can no longer afford by its own
admission. In December 2020 the Government announced it would be leasing 13 electric vehicles
for the Post Office from Bassadone Motors. The cost over seven years was announced as
£434,028, whereas in answer to Question 646/2020 it was stated that the outright purchase cost
would have been lower at £341,473, or £92,555 less. At the end of the rental period the
330 Government will not even own the vehicles, despite having paid more than the purchase price.
This model, I suspect, is going to be rolled out for the entire Government motor vehicle fleet, given
the reference to expression of interest issued in December 2016 and for which apparently
Bassadone Motors were the only party.

335 In obtaining the use of buildings and equipment in this way by long-term renting, the
Government is in effect now borrowing the assets. It has an implicit financing cost. Indeed, if the
Government were ever minded – which I doubt it would ever do – to move to accrual accounting
and adopt IFRS, under IFRS16 the Government would have to put these long-term rental assets
and the associated liabilities on its balance sheet as what are now known as ‘right of use assets’.

340 And so, Mr Speaker, after begging, this Government is now borrowing. It has borrowed cash
directly, cash indirectly, and now it is borrowing assets and renting things rather than acquiring
them, as it can no longer afford to do so.

Let’s now consider how the Government has signalled how it intends to scrape together
whatever cash it can find at the back of the proverbial No. 6 plush leather sofa. In his 2021 May
Day Message, over which I am sure he agonised, the Chief Minister stated the following – and
345 again I really cannot impersonate his voice, but I will have to go for lessons:

I can guarantee you that we will ensure that we will stop all waste and all abuse we detect in government spending.

Well, Mr Speaker, I would dearly like to hear exactly how the Government intends to go about
doing that, because I have heard nothing tangible so far.

350 So, let’s talk about waste. I wonder what the Principal Auditor has to say about waste. The
Appropriation Bill before us today shows no decrease in recurrent expenditure and so I can only
assume that no waste has been detected. But then again, given that the last Principal Auditor’s
report was for the year 2015-16, we in this Parliament do not have the benefit of the Principal
Auditor’s opinions regarding expenditure and value-for-money spends for any subsequent years.
For this reason alone, in the detecting of waste Parliament needs the Principal Auditor’s reports
now and not years later. We need his reports as soon as they are available. We cannot wait five
355 years for his reports.

I understand that one of the reasons given for the delay in such reports is the need for the
passing of the Supplementary Appropriation Bills. I drew attention to this in 2018 and again in
2019, and the situation has only got worse. The Supplementary Appropriation Bill for 2016-17 was
originally published on 12th January 2018 and we have still to debate it in this House. It is actually
360 on the Agenda now and it has been for months. The Supplementary Appropriation Bill for
2017-18 was originally published on 8th March 2019 and we have still to debate it in this House –
and please do not tell me it is because of COVID and Brexit, because we have had umpteen other
Bills debated in this House but not these two Bills because the Chief Minister does not think they
are important.

365 Both these Bills embarrassingly then had to be re-gazetted on 31st October 2019 because
Parliament dissolved and we had a General Election. So, we had two supplementary
appropriations for a Parliament that had been dissolved and they have not yet been debated. It is
perhaps without precedent that two Supplementary Appropriation Bills for a prior Parliament
have had to be carried over to a new one. What would happen if a new Parliament declined to
370 approve them? The Supplementary Appropriation Bill for 2018-19 was published on 30th January

2020 and again we have still to debate it in this House. That cannot be. The Constitution is quite clear when it states, under section 69(3):

(3) If in any financial year it is found –

(a) that the amount appropriated by the appropriation law for the purposes included in any head of expenditure is insufficient or that a need has arisen for expenditure for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the appropriation law; or

(b) that any moneys have been expended on any head of expenditure in excess of the amount appropriated for the purposes included in that head by the appropriation law or for a purpose for which no amount has been appropriated by the appropriation law,

the Minister with responsibility for finance shall cause a supplementary estimate showing the sums required or spent to be prepared and laid before the Parliament and the heads of expenditure shall be included in a supplementary appropriation bill introduced in the Parliament to provide for the appropriation of those sums.

Hon. Chief Minister: When?

375 **Hon. R M Clinton:** Mr Speaker, the intention is quite clear, and yet no doubt the Government
feel that by merely introducing a Bill they are complying with the Constitution. A simple, plain
reading of the Constitution is clear as to what the intention is: in any year you bring the
Appropriation Bill. It cannot be that you have three years of Supplementary Appropriation Bills
380 outstanding and yet approve subsequent years' Budgets. It is nonsense. What happens if in the
case of the two years that were pending the new Parliament refuses to approve it? Does that
mean to say the entire Government is guilty on this appropriation? It cannot be allowed to
continue in that way. The Chief Minister can say, 'Well, it doesn't say when,' but it does not have
to say when, it is obvious. At present, none of those excess expenditures have been authorised by
this Parliament and as such they remain unauthorised expenditure for which the Minister for
385 Public Finance is solely responsible. And so I would urge Government to put its house in order and
allow the debate of these Bills. If they do not, I can only conclude that they are actively seeking to
undermine the work of the Principal Auditor and delay his reports so that they are of no value to
this Parliament in identifying any waste or scrutinising Government.

It is also verging on the ridiculous for the Financial Secretary to write a circular to controlling
390 officers and accounting officers on 28th January 2021 stating:

You are therefore formally notified that should it appear to this office that proper budgetary control and cost-cutting
practices have not been observed by any Department, Agency or Authority, appropriate action – including
surcharging your salary with the unauthorised expenditure – will be taken against the respective controlling officer
or Agency/Authority head for failing to adhere to this STRICT Government instruction.

And yet the Minister for Finance ignores the requirement of our Constitution to obtain approval
for excess expenditure – not for one year but for three years. Perhaps this Parliament should write
him a letter threatening to surcharge his salary for the full amount. No doubt he can afford it.
(Interjection)

395 I imagine that, given the circumstances, Government would want the Principal Auditor to
conduct more value for money audits, and yet I note that the headcount for the Audit department
is set to decrease by 10% – or is it that this Government does not consider the audit function as
necessary or value for money?

I can already identify one clear area of waste – if the Chief Minister wants to take a note – and
400 it is simply this, and this really is quite remarkable: why on earth do we have two sets of the
2021-22 Estimates Book? Why was the Book reissued in full, 292 pages – it is quite heavy –
multiplied by I do not know how many copies they produced, plus all the effort that went into it?
Why on earth reissue them in full only to reflect a ministerial reshuffle? A five-year-old could have
told them that a simple one-page insertion showing which Minister had responsibility for which
405 head would have been sufficient; perhaps they will adopt that in the future. As much as Sir Joe
loves the planet, it is evident that the Chief Minister does not, because he is happy to kill another

tree in unnecessary waste. (*Interjections*) Why go to the trouble and the need to amend the Appropriation Bill by reordering the head numbering? Surely Government Ministers do not need reminding which Departments they are responsible for – or perhaps they really do not know any more. The Government preaches about the need to reduce waste but cannot see its own crass waste of resources, especially at this difficult time.

That was waste. Let's turn to the question of abuse that the Chief Minister alluded to in his May Day Message. In their 2019 Manifesto the GSLP Liberals promised to create an Anti-Corruption Authority and said the following:

given that there have been suggestions by others that such an independent Anti-Corruption Authority should be created, we believe it is important for transparency that the incumbent Government should not stand in the way of the establishment of such an authority. We will therefore now, as we said we would, establish a totally independent Anti-Corruption Authority within six months of the election. As we had proposed in 2011, the Authority will have the right to investigate matters as from 1988.

Given the Chief Minister's vow to tackle abuse, I would have expected this to be high up his political agenda and already on the Parliament's Agenda, but I have yet to see a Bill introduced to Parliament to put this into effect. This does not indicate to me that the Chief Minister is really serious when he claims to want to tackle abuse – or is it that he already knows where to find it and he does not need an independent body to identify it? The tax-paying public deserve action to stamp out abuse, and not empty words.

On the subject of abuse and waste – and here I really am flogging a dead horse, I fear – I again recommend that this Parliament set up a permanent Public Accounts Committee to review all matters that require investigation and any that are raised by the Principal Auditor. I will again remind this Parliament that we are the only UK Overseas Territory that does not have a Public Accounts Committee. Montserrat has one. St Helena has one, for God's sake! The fact that we do not have one means that we stick out like a sore thumb and it goes against what is deemed best practice in the oversight of public finance. The Chief Minister will claim to the public that Gibraltar will come to a grinding halt because everything will be bound up in bureaucracy and nothing will move, but it is nonsense because it happens in every parliament in the world – but here we are special. Without regular and prompt reports from a properly resourced Principal Auditor, ignoring the need to have excess unapproved expenditure brought to this Parliament and approved, not setting up an Anti-Corruption Authority and not having a Public Accounts Committee, how exactly does the Chief Minister hope to tackle waste and abuse? How? I will not hold my breath because I am sure he has no answer.

Let's move on to this Government's need to scrape at the back of the taxpayer's sofa for the odd coin to make up its deficit. Let's talk of stealth taxes and the rationing of services. On this side of the House we have long warned of the excessive spending by this Government and that ultimately it would be the taxpayer who would foot the bill. We have already seen the huge Social Insurance increases that this Government has imposed, without warning or consultation, with effect from 1st July, some of which it claims is newly discovered social justice to explain sudden 142% increases in voluntary contributions, which it never saw fit to do in 2017 when they were last revised.

In the Chief Minister's revision to the HEPSS scheme it was really telling that those affected would be allowed a transitional period and grandfathering for two years, a luxury that this Government has not extended to those paying voluntary contributions. No transitional period for them – oh, no, it is only afforded to highly paid executives. This is this Government's socialist credentials at their best and their concept of social justice. But I have to, at the very least, thank the Father of the House for considering my plea that he reconsider the increase in Social Security contributions for voluntary contributors, of which he says 'bar 232', and if I understood him correctly what he is suggesting is that they will consider requests from individuals who may face hardship in meeting these increases. In that respect I do thank the Father of the House for what seems to be an indication of some flexibility, although I gather he says for new contributors it will

455 be that rate with no flexibility. I hope he is true to his word and he does show some flexibility to those 232 voluntary contributors who of course, unlike the HEPSS, which the Government is so fond of, have not been given any kind of transitional period.

460 It really is truly sad to see the Chief Minister tell people that they should be content with Budget measures as they would be worse off in Germany. It was even more pathetic to hear him rattle off a set of GDP per capita league tables and debt-to-GDP ratios which even the Father of the House openly admits are meaningless and that he himself admitted were meaningless and irrelevant to this debate since it did not mean more money for the Government or indeed the taxpayer. It is total nonsense and all it does is perpetuate what Sir Joe has called this concept of GDP perception: 'We have the highest GDP, we are better than Luxemburg, we are better than this, we are number 7 in the league table.' Why go on and on about it when he knows it is nonsense? The Father of the House keeps on telling him it is nonsense (*Interjection*) but he keeps on saying it. So why say it? What is the point? He does not get more money in the Government revenue. The taxpayer does not feel any better off. On the contrary, they are thinking, 'Hang on a minute, I should be as rich as the richest guy in Luxembourg but I don't feel rich.' Why say it, Mr Speaker? It is just pure, unadulterated waffle and nonsense only inserted to add spin to a speech which had no substance. And he has the audacity to call our taxpayers spoilt and tells them to grow up. This Government is now telling taxpayers, 'You are spoilt: grow up. We are the Government, we know what is best. We owe you money, we take your money. Shut up.' It does not wash.

475 We have seen how all sorts of Government licences and fees have been increased without warning. Housing rents keep on going up by 3% every year. Why? We have to pay the £300 million mortgage on the six housing estates – the £300 million that disappeared. He spent it. What on? I do not know – we did not debate it in this Parliament. We gave no approval to it. They have not even given approval to it themselves because it has not been approved by this Parliament. Completely bypass Parliament, his Government company system – fantastic. I am sure he will win a public finance prize.

480 We have seen the rationing of post-graduate funding for our students. We have seen GJBS bailed out with £23 million. Where does the money come from? I do not know. Maybe he can tell us.

485 We can see today in the Estimates Book that there is no contribution to Community Care by this Government in the last financial year, which ended in 2020, despite all we have heard from Sir Joe – and he did go on a bit – about Community Care. The outturn for 2019-21, the two-year period – in fact, we are talking about a two-year period, not even a one-year period but a two-year period – zilch, zero, nothing. Nothing to Community Care in two years, Mr Speaker. Community Care is now having to rely on its reserves, which by my estimation of about £80-odd million would only last four years. And so it is the GSLP that is now running down Community Care's reserves, contrary to their much repeated mantra. Let me say that again: it is the GSLP who are running down Community Care's reserves. It is no wonder that the rules of Community Care have been arbitrarily changed at some mysterious date on 17th February 2020. Why that date? What is so special about it? Why then? We do not know, but what is undeniable is that in this Book for two years, 2019-21, there is no contribution showing, at least from reserves, going to Community Care, other than perhaps somewhere back in the Social Assistance Fund, which is an amount which is usually £7½ million ... I cannot remember, but there is no contribution from surplus and there is no top-up going to Community Care. (*Interjection by Hon. Sir JJ Bossano*) No, but again we are not winding down Community Care, they are.

495 Yesterday we heard of increases in corporate tax and electricity bills. There was also, I think I detected, a thinly veiled threat that the Government may yet increase personal taxes and perhaps even tax pensioners. So, where are the rainy day funds Sir Joe is so fond of? Where are our public finance buffers?

This is evidently a Government in a panic and it is evident for all now to see as it hits their pockets in its dash for cash. Yesterday, in a bid to raise £25½ million the Government has put up

505 for sale the 700 berths in the small boats marina – the small boats marina it was so proud of – at prices of between £32,000 and £40,000. Is there anything else it can flog to stay afloat, I wonder? What else is left of the family silver that he can flog?

Hon. Chief Minister: Ten pounds a flog. *(Laughter)*

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Hon. R M Clinton: Well, I am sure he will enjoy that – I am sure he is willing to pay for it himself. Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister alone is the one who needs to grow up – I think he just demonstrated that – and accept responsibility for his mismanagement of our public finances.

515 Now a few words on inward investment. We have seen little in the way of the Government's post-Brexit economic plan. The joint venture projects in Chinese modular construction show little by way of generating employment and inward investment. On the contrary, the money is flowing in the wrong direction, to China. We have seen nothing in respect of the 150,000 square metre reclamation project which was central to the Government's economic plan. The Deputy Chief Minister said nothing of the tenders on the Rooke site and we have heard nothing of the Queen's Cinema and Queen's Hotel sites, for which the Chief Minister claimed he had a very attractive proposal. Whereas I can accept some delay due to COVID, it would appear that some, if not all of these projects are no longer on the drawing board. Very strangely, all we have seen are some rather tacky flags appearing on buildings in Line Wall Road declaring in almost Soviet and not Cuban style 'National Economic Plan – Sponsored Project'. All they had to add was 'coming soon in the lifetime of this Parliament ... perhaps'.

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525 The Employment Survey published for 2020 shows we have lost 1,087 or 3.6% of the jobs in the economy. I hear what the Father of the House has said about wanting to change the nature of the economy to a less labour-intensive and less cross-border-dependent type of workforce, but where is the Government's National Economic Plan to recover those jobs? What is the Government's future job strategy, other than a newfound faith in medicinal cannabis production, on which I remain to be convinced as to the merits?

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535 Mr Speaker, Sir Joe treated us to his usual very detailed and very informative contribution to the debate, which, as he quipped, was invaluable to this House in the past, and I think it is still of value, if not invaluable, too. He said a couple of things. I am not going to go through his entire speech, because to do so would be to repeat unnecessarily, but let me pick on a few points he made in the context of the economy, inward investment etc.

540 The first point: on the concept of waste – and on this we are all on the same page – he said every penny counts, and I agree every penny does count but the example has to come from the top and that has to start with the Government. The public, the Civil Service, every Agency will want to see that economising and that efficiency coming from the top; otherwise, I fear that rather than achieving good management the word 'austerity' will be used. And so I am at one with him on the need to save every penny, because we really do need every penny, but how you go about achieving that requires buy in from the general public, it requires buy in from every single Department, every single service, all the unions in Gibraltar, the private sector, everybody. As he freely admits, it is not going to be easy. It is not an easy political sell. I can tell him that I agree with what his intention is but he has to be able to get buy in, and to get buy in there has to be example and the Government has to act in the way I have already suggested, which is by way of putting in mechanisms, as he has already suggested, where unauthorised expenditure or excessive expenditure has to be pre-approved rather than post-approved. Otherwise, what on earth is the point of having the Budget and what on earth would we be doing here anyway? So, I agree with him.

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555 He may have missed my comments about the voluntary contributions, but I will repeat them now briefly – that if I understood him correctly, he is willing to consider some flexibility for those who may truly be in a hardship position when they come to meet the increased requirements. In that respect I thank him for at least considering that, which I think will be received well by those 230 people concerned.

Talking about the customs union, he and I have both agreed on public television that we are at one on the concept of whether Gibraltar should or should not join the customs union and we have both come down on perhaps the more hawkish side in that we do not necessarily see the economic advantage. But in his contribution – and I have to bring this up – he kind of downplayed it and said, ‘We are not really asking for a customs union, all we are talking about is our shopping bags and’ – I would have said sausages, but you cannot get sausages anymore – ‘whatever it is we take over to Spain, cheese, dairy products, whatever since there is on a border inspection post in La Linea.’ But if he reads the Framework Agreement he will know that there is a ‘may’ section in there, of which the Chief Minister said, ‘Well, it is “may” but is not “may” because we do not really have a choice, because if we do not have it we cannot have a free-flowing, fluid border, because Schengen without a customs union is not going to make any sense to Spain.’ So, I really must urge him to perhaps re-read the Framework Agreement in that we are not really talking about the question of what is in your shopping bags every time you go across. This is actually a lot more serious than he would suggest in his contribution and there are indications that the concept of the introduction of VAT is not so much a ‘Maybe, but if you want this, this is what you are going to have to do,’ and if we do have to do that it will have a significant impact on our economy.

Talking about our economy, he made reference to trade opportunities and the fact that he may be leading a trade mission to Morocco and perhaps other places. He may not remember, but in probably the first TV debate we had in the 2015 election we were asked the question ‘Where do you see trade?’ I said, if I remember correctly, that we should be looking south towards Morocco, and he said, ‘No, I am looking north because I am selling to 500 million people in the European Union. But of course that is no longer available to us, so in that again, at the risk of repeating myself, I agree with him – we should be looking south and we should be looking at opportunities in Morocco. We have good friends in Morocco. We understand Morocco and we have very good contacts there, so in that respect I would encourage him in his efforts in order to generate trade.

I was very interested in the analysis that he did on the relativities of the export market of the UK to Gibraltar, Malta and Morocco, and that Gibraltar is quite a significant export partner from the United Kingdom. In that respect it is even more important that in whatever is discussed in the European context we do not lose our ability to trade with the United Kingdom, because of course at the moment on financial services we have a bilateral agreement for access to the United Kingdom and what we never want to happen is for somebody in the Treasury to say, ‘You have got a good deal with Europe, we are going to close the door,’ because that, as he has already pointed out, is £4 billion worth of trade. Of course there are exports from the UK to Gibraltar. I am not quite sure what those exports are, whether they are invisible services or actually goods, but in any case, if we can capture a fraction of that market as a go-between for Morocco or some other territory in North Africa, we will be doing well, as indeed Gibraltar used to do in the 19th century.

In terms of his efforts on trade, all I can say is it is interesting and it is probably the direction that Gibraltar needs to look at. As he said quite honestly and openly, he is thinking outside the box and I think that is what we need to do. As a collective, we need to think outside the box and be creative in how we approach our economic plan. In that respect I would welcome, at some point in the future, if he would update his post-Brexit plan into what he calls now the post-pandemic plan, in terms of how he sees Gibraltar moving in the future. What kind of economy does he expect us to have? What kind of opportunities will there be for our youth in the years to come? In that respect I welcome the Father of the House’s contribution and hope that next year we will have the results of his hard work and efforts in Morocco and other places.

Mr Speaker, if I can now turn to something a bit more mundane – and I am drawing to a close – I was surprised yesterday to hear the Chief Minister say:

businesses have often said that it is difficult to deal with these measures once announced, without the relevant legislation in place.

605 By 'these measures' he means the Budget measures. This was the very point I raised in my
Private Member's Motion in March 2018 when I urged the reintroduction of a Finance Bill. When
I made the point to the Government they admitted in the questions that Budget measures for
2015 and 2016 had not yet been published as amending Bills. So, this is not a malaise that he can
610 attribute only to a GSD Government but in fact to every Government since Sir Joe did away with
Finance Bills, which had covered Budget measures prior 1988. Prior to that date it was the practice
to have an Appropriation Bill and a Finance Bill. The Finance Bill is meant to reflect changes in
taxation and necessary consequential amendments to primary legislation.

We had a very long debate on 26th March 2018 as to the virtues or otherwise of a Finance Bill
and the Government claimed that it was not their mantra to have one, as they were not in the
615 business of raising taxes. I do not intend to rerun the debate now, and obviously my motion was
defeated by Government majority, but when the Chief Minister claimed yesterday that he had
finally heard the complaints of businesses about the time lag in amending legislation to enact
Budget measures I really was pleasantly surprised that finally the validity of my argument would
be heeded. But the Chief Minister then stated:

In respect of those measures which require a primary change to legislation, I will be seeking to amend the Bill before
the House in order to propose the inclusion of the changes necessary to the Income Tax Act as we pass this Bill ...

620 Mr Speaker, first of all we have had no notice of this proposed amendment, and secondly I
think it is technically incompatible with the Appropriation Bill. Our Standing Orders refer to the
Appropriation Bill under Rule 32A and a Finance Bill under Rule 32B. They are different beasts.
The Appropriation Bill requires notice under Rule 29 and the Finance Bill is exempt from this
requirement. Furthermore, the Finance Bill cannot be proceeded on under Rule 32B(3) before the
625 Appropriation Bill has been read for the third time. They are separate animals, Mr Speaker. The
Appropriation Bill by definition can only cover matters in respect of expenditure.

Budget measures requiring amendment to tax legislation are evidently Finance Bill matters and
not Appropriation Bill matters. I cannot see how such Budget measures can be added to the
Appropriation Bill. It is illogical and incompatible with the Rules of this House. But if the
630 Government were minded to bring a Finance Bill to this House with those amending provisions
for which they need not give any notice under Rule 29, I for one would not object and in fact I
would urge them to do so. It would put this House back on track on modern fiscal parliamentary
practice. As I said in the debate in 2018, we need to do better because we cannot afford to have
legislation playing catch-up with taxation.

635 Mr Speaker, in the event that the Government is not minded to bring a Finance Bill I would be
grateful for your formal ruling on the point of order that Finance Bill taxation matters cannot be
added to the Appropriation Bill and that the procedure of Rule 32B needs to be applied. They
cannot be mixed, Mr Speaker, and I would be grateful for your ruling if the Government is not
willing to bring a Finance Bill in that respect.

640 To sum up and conclude, this Government is now having to beg, borrow and scrape to make
ends meet. It is begging for donors to fund public sector projects and, importantly, the National
Theatre, which they forgot to build despite their many manifesto promises that fall under that
category. They have borrowed directly to fund the cost of COVID-19 but do not have a credible
repayment plan that I have heard of, and the UK guarantee for three years is far too short. Our
645 gross direct debt is now £697 million at 31st March 2021, having grown by £250 million. The
indirect gross debt levels are now at a level where we simply do not know if they are affordable
or not, which I now estimate at another £959 million. Our total gross direct and indirect debt I
now estimate to be around £1.7 billion – yes, Mr Speaker, £1.7 billion – at 31st March 2021, of
which only £250 million can be blamed on COVID-19.

650 The Government is now resorting to borrowing buildings such as the new St Mary's School, the
Rooke Nursing home and the hostel by renting them because it simply does not have the cash. It
is renting vehicles that it will not even own after paying more than it would cost to buy them

outright. These measures will cost the taxpayer more in the long run, as I can guarantee the private sector providers will ensure they make a very healthy profit for themselves.

655 This Government is now scraping together every last penny it can squeeze out of the taxpayer with Social Insurance increases, rent increases, fee increases, and yesterday we heard they are even flogging the berths in the small boats marina. *(Interjection)* Yet in sharp contrast – which the Chief Minister finds so amusing – he seems to find the money to pay for the transfer of the rubble mound for the Victoria Keys reclamation and its private developers. This is his concept of social justice. This is his concept of socialism: tax the population, gift to the private developers.

660 In his May Day Message the Chief Minister called for solidarity. There can be no solidarity while he refuses to allow transparency. There is no transparency of Government-owned companies and their borrowing. There can be no solidarity when he claims to want to stamp out waste and abuse while gagging, evidently, the Principal Auditor and not setting up an Anti-Corruption Authority or even a Public Accounts Committee. Where is the intent? Words, Mr Speaker. There can be no solidarity when the taxpayer is asked to pay for this Government's mistakes and its pet projects such as Victoria Keys for its very favoured developers, with no accountability, no responsibility and no consequences. There can be no solidarity without trust, and this is not a Budget that can be trusted.

670 This is a begging bowl Budget, lacking in transparency, responsibility and accountability, and I simply will not vote for it.

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

Mr Speake: The Hon. Samantha Sacramento.

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Minister for the Health Authority, Justice, Multiculturalism, Equality and Community Affairs (Hon. Miss S J Sacramento): Mr Speaker, it is indeed a privilege to address Parliament this year, as we were unable to do so in the normal manner last year. And what a year it has been. Little did I expect, when I was appointed Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies in the autumn of 2019, what this would entail a few months later.

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The Office of Civil Contingencies has been at the very centre of the Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis response operation saw the early activation of the Government's command structures and the establishment of a COVID-19 Strategic Co-ordinating Group, which I chair and which was responsible for continually assessing the risks and vulnerabilities, implementing the Government's strategy and co-ordinating the tactical activities across all Government Departments, responding agencies, the military and, of course, the army of volunteers who stood up to help in every possible way. The challenges posed by this deadly virus have been both manifold and manifest, and Government has left no stone unturned to protect the lives of those in our community and manage the impact on our livelihoods and our way of life.

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But 2020 was not only dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, last year we saw the United Kingdom and Gibraltar leaving the European Union. As negotiations towards a Brexit deal continued, Government also increased the tempo in its contingency planning and preparations to mitigate the impact of a potential no-deal Brexit. This work, led of course by the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister and supported by the Office of Civil Contingencies, ran in parallel to the COVID-19 pandemic and peaked at the time when Gibraltar was hit hardest by December's killer second wave. The hive of activity generated by these two once-in-a-generation events occurring simultaneously was both intense and unrelenting.

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As soon as news of a SARS-type lung infection in Wuhan broke in January 2020, Government immediately convened a meeting to assess the potential impact of this disease reaching our borders. By 27th January 2020, Government formally established the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinating Group responsible for monitoring developments and ramping up planning and preparation. In early March 2020 Government activated its COVID-19 response structures as follows.

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705 The GHA was faced with a potential scenario of hundreds of deaths and people requiring hospitalisation. St Bernard's Hospital and Elderly Residential Services have been at the sharp end of the pandemic. Increasing bed capacity, resources, equipment and PPE to deal with this was a critical requirement and the Government's main effort. COVID-19 also brought the requirement to establish unique capabilities that were outside the normal functions of a conventional hospital.
710 Such requirements included the need to establish the following bespoke capabilities specifically for the pandemic.

The GHA 111 service call centre has been a crucial service. We needed to provide people requiring medical assistance with a way to get the support they needed quickly and without physically turning up at the Hospital. Effective infection control would be a key weapon against
715 the spread of the virus, and for this reason every effort possible was made to minimise non-emergency visits to the Hospital. GHA 111 became the focal point for all medical matters, and since the start of the pandemic the operators have dealt with well over 35,000 consultations over the phone.

The COVID-19 swabbing station: because testing and screening was key. Government's ability
720 to effectively contain the virus would rely heavily on knowing who was carrying it. For obvious reasons, the COVID-19 swabbing station had to be established outside of the Hospital, again to reduce the risk of transmissibility. A facility that was set up from scratch, the COVID-19 swabbing station has collected and processed over a quarter of a million swabs.

The COVID-19 laboratory has been our eyes and ears, without which events would have
725 unfolded very differently, allowing us to have a firm hold on the developing epidemiological situation, thereby driving the decision-making process. Their efforts and achievements have been tremendous. Our scientists and laboratory support staff have worked tirelessly throughout, often working endless hours, and it is incredible that in little Gibraltar we are now also undertaking genomic testing to identify the strain of the virus in positive cases in under 72 hours.

730 The Contact Tracing Bureau has effectively dealt with over 4,000 positive cases. This has required a thorough risk assessment of every case as well as the identification and management of close contacts, and the spread of the virus has been significantly slowed down, ultimately resulting in many lives being saved.

ERS, as the organisation responsible for the largest vulnerable group, bore the brunt of the
735 COVID-19 response. Infection control was their top priority and efforts were made to control the spread of the virus and provide healthcare to all their residents.

The Nightingale Hospital was a facility created at the Europa Point Sports Complex to provide additional bed capacity to St Bernard's Hospital for lower dependent patients and also prepared to take higher dependency patients if St Bernard's became overwhelmed.

740 The isolation facility at the Europa Retreat Centre was created to isolate those mostly non-residents and sea farers arriving from high-risk countries. The facility also accommodated positive cases who were either unable to self-isolate at a place of residence or were discharged from hospital.

The Care Agency was tasked with looking after vulnerable groups, and the Vulnerable Groups
745 team was established to provide that support.

We also had response teams, and a dedicated response team worked under the direction of the Care Agency to support the more vulnerable households. Support included the provision of free food packs and other essentials during lockdown. We also had a Community Support Group, which was established to co-ordinate the support from the hundreds of volunteers, organisations
750 and individuals.

Importantly, the Mental Health and Well-being Support team was established because mental health, and post-traumatic stress disorder in particular, has been a central area of concern throughout the response operations. A bespoke Mental Health and Well-being team was established to deliver frontline resilience management training to all responding organisations, as
755 well as support to the more vulnerable members of the community through the setting up of a befriending service.

We set up a Public Information Call Centre. The 200-41818 Public Information Call Centre became the one-stop focal point to deal with all non-medical issues in the community. Telephone operators were quickly able to deliver support to members of the community and well over 45,000 calls have been received since it was established.

The Business Support Group: as lockdown measures and other restrictions were imposed, many businesses were either forced to cease operations or operate differently. The creation of CELAC allowed Government to work closely with the private sector.

The Logistical Support Group: the ability to procure and manage critical equipment such as PPE was severely tested during the earlier part of the pandemic as demand far outweighed supply. As countries scrambled to get as much PPE as they could, efforts had to be made to source these from wherever possible. It was important that these were centrally managed to ensure that frontline departments were issued with the equipment that they needed.

Command Support: the gathering of timely information and shared situation awareness across all Government Departments is a crucial function. The Office of Civil Contingencies has published daily situation reports (SITREPs) since the very start of the pandemic. These have been prepared by the Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator, Mr Ivor Lopez, who I can assure you, Mr Speaker, has worked 365 days on this, as he provides the SITREP without fail every single morning. The timely and accurate reporting of critical information has been the key factor in the Government's decision-making process.

Legislation Support: since the start of the pandemic, the legal team from the Government Law Offices has published over 300 regulations under the Civil Contingencies Act. These have set a legal basis for the introduction of various public health measures, which again has been key in controlling the spread of the virus.

Media: another indispensable tool in the response has been the Government's ability to communicate with the public. Daily press conferences, regular press releases, as well as constant engagement with the local and international media has allowed the public to be kept regularly informed.

It has taken a pandemic for the general public to understand the existence and the role of the Office of Civil Contingencies and also the importance of the essential role that our healthcare and Social Services professionals play. I am very happy that the efforts of the collective were recognised by His Worship the Mayor in granting them a special Mayor's Award, and more recently that Ivor Lopez and Sandie Gracia were recognised in Her Majesty's Birthday Honours List.

Beyond the pandemic, the Office of Civil Contingencies is driven by a formal identification of threats and risks to Gibraltar. Emergency plans are developed to ultimately save lives and ensure an efficient response. Under the umbrella of the Gibraltar Contingency Council, below are some of the plans on which the Office of Civil Contingencies continues to work closely with other organisations and agencies: marauding terrorist attack; chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear explosive response framework; cyber security; and mass casualty plan.

I must thank everyone from the Civil Contingencies team, so ably lead by Mr Ivor Lopez MBE, for leading the pandemic arrangements with such military precision.

In August last year a Cabinet of 10 Ministers became nine when my good friend Gilbert Licudi stepped down from the Government benches and I was given the privilege to receive, in the middle of a pandemic, the additional portfolios of Health, Elderly Care and Social Services and the Care Agency, the Departments at the heart of the COVID-19 response.

Let me start by referring to the work of the Elderly Residential Services, as they have been the most precious Department during the last year. In 2019, the number of doctors at ERS was increased. During the pandemic the medical team was further increased in order to be able to cope with the implementation of a medicalised model of care, the aim of which was to prevent admission to St Bernard's Hospital as much as possible, and the introduction of a matron for ERS in 2019 was widely welcomed by health users and professionals.

810 Since the early days of this pandemic the dedicated teams at ERS have worked tirelessly to put in place infection control and prevention measures to curtail the spread of the virus. This has included daily PCR and lateral flow testing and use of PPE for all staff, not to mention the cautious enhanced cleaning and disinfecting that continues to take place.

815 Acquiring and refurbishment of the onsite cottage and converting it to a new four-bedroom isolation unit for Mount Alvernia, bringing the total isolation bed capacity to 16 beds ... In addition to isolation rooms, which were created and equipped with all the necessary equipment, and staff bubbles created in all the departments to safeguard any further exposure, all staff were upskilled and trained to deliver acute care. The safety and well-being of the residents in ERS has remained a top priority and they continue to use all the resources available to them to keep them safe. There was a daily increase of physiotherapy to all residents, which helped with mobility, and increased medical support was delivered to ensure the health and safety of all residents. As well as protecting the physical health of ERS residents, helping to protect their mental well-being and prevent loneliness was also an important step. This included daily video calls for all residents and their families and increased activity programmes for those able to take part.

825 I have nothing but the highest praise for the management and all staff at the ERS for their absolute dedication to the service and its residents, always going over and above to keep them safe. I cannot thank everyone at ERS enough for the work they have done and continue to do – this was under the extraordinary leadership of Susan Vallejo in particular.

830 Throughout the pandemic ERS was also extremely mindful of residents and people in the community living with dementia, and special provisions were put in place both in terms of outreach support and within the facilities to be able to support people who have dementia, in line with our Dementia National Strategy and National Plan. A lot of the outreach support was done through the Bella Vista day centre, which unfortunately was suspended during the pandemic. This building was adapted to cater for a 26-bed residential care facility as part of the COVID response, and support then to those users was provided through the outreach team. The aim of this team was to continue with therapeutic services and assistance with medical and social care, as well as the provision of the meals on wheels service.

840 I regret to inform the public that I have been informed by GHA and ERS management today that a decision has been taken, following Public Health advice, to cease the service at the Bella Vista day centre commencing from Monday. The service will continue for the next few days only for those who have not been able to make alternative arrangements. It is with great regret that this decision has been taken, but it has been taken in the interest of all service users, to contain the spread .

845 Mr Speaker, turning now to the Gibraltar Health Authority, I would like to start with some background to the two previous financial years and the unexpected but very significant pressures placed on the GHA. The start of the GHA's financial year coincided with a major incident posture as declared by the Chief Minister on 27th March 2020. By this point the GHA was already fully in action with COVID preparations. With this formalisation of command structures and processes, routine and non-urgent clinical services were reduced or stopped, teams were reorganised, dedicated COVID and non-COVID wards and clinical areas were set up and staffed, and patient consultations were moved primarily to telephone based. At that time the Ophthalmology department was moved to the University, the Chemotherapy Suite was moved to the Cancer Relief Centre, and routine blood taking in the PCC was moved to the old PCC site – all measures put in place to minimise patients coming into the Hospital and being placed at risk of infection.

855 The GHA introduced a readiness or threat assessment system, graded from green to yellow to amber to red, dictated by the number of COVID cases in the community and therefore how ready the GHA needed to be for a possible surge in cases, while at the same time allowing key personnel some well-deserved annual leave and rest. On 21st December 2020 a sharp rise in COVID cases led very quickly to another lockdown and the declaration of a second major incident on 22nd December 2020. January 2021 was an extremely difficult month with a total of 66 COVID deaths, of which 39 were in the Elderly Residential Services. The GHA went in to black alert status on

860 11th January 2021. Routine clinical services were once again stopped and staff were recalled from annual leave. Due to the rapid lockdown and escalation of the readiness status, the rise in cases was thankfully short-lived, and on 29th January the GHA reduced the alert status to red, and then to amber on 22nd February and yellow on 19th April. The Europa Nightingale Field Hospital was decommissioned on 5th March 2021 and routine clinical services gradually resumed once again.

865 A staff COVID-19 swabbing service was introduced on 13th July 2020, originally offering monthly swabs to all GHA staff. Since then, the service has expanded in reaction to the rise in cases and the need to protect patients, staff and visitors to GHA sites. Now vaccinated staff are swabbed weekly and non-vaccinated staff twice a week.

870 On 10th January 2021 the COVID-19 Pfizer-BioNTech vaccination programme, which we called Operation Freedom, started with three main efforts: staff vaccinations at the St Bernard's vaccination centre, individuals over 70 years old and those in vulnerable groups at the old PCC at the ICC vaccination centre, and the residents of the Elderly Residential Services on site. Dedicated and trained teams from across all clinical and administrative specialities formed the vaccination teams and delivered a seamless service to all those vaccinated. Applications for the vaccination programme closed on 1st June and in total the programme delivered 39,320 first doses and 39,061 second doses – we are still continuing with second doses. A total of 78,381 vaccines have been administered and, importantly, not one single dose has been wasted.

880 I now move to outline the key projects in the GHA that have been ongoing throughout the pandemic, albeit sometimes postponed due to having to focus resources solely on COVID-19 and management of the pandemic. First and foremost is the ambitious Reset, Restart and Recover programme for the GHA. This will mean a review of all key areas of the GHA to see how they can be improved so as to provide a better service to the public. We have learnt a lot from the pandemic, and most notably the pandemic has made us all work differently and more efficiently. One of the key cornerstones of Reset, Restart and Recover is to keep the working practices that work best as we recast the provision of healthcare in a way that better meets the needs and demands of our community. This will be done in consultation with stakeholders and the unions.

885 As Chair of the GHA Board I am changing the way that the board operates and will reinvigorate its way of working. I will ask the board to consider the strategic direction of the GHA on the services that we need to provide, and develop a workforce strategy that will make us more self-sufficient as well as oversee the strategic repatriation of services, where possible. The new board will have a greater involvement in the GHA as it holds its management to account in the delivery of strategic priorities. All in all, we will be focusing on efficiency, looking at better value for money and how we can eliminate waste from the system, and looking to improve the patient experience to ensure that they get the best outcomes. The patient will be first and foremost in our plans and the money will be diverted to patient care and not lost in bureaucracy. In parallel, we will also be looking at improving the health of our community, as prevention is better than cure. This work has already commenced and reviews on the management of surgical waiting lists, pharmacy and mental health are already underway.

900 Background work has gained pace in some of the infrastructure projects in the GHA, such as the upgrade of the Theatre Sterile Supply Unit, which supplies all sterile equipment for the Health Authority, and a new ENT department, which will be relocated to provide more clinical space and a dedicated sound-proofed hearing and testing area.

905 Following a series of very positive meetings with the Prostate Cancer Support Group, I am pleased to be able to report that an agreement has been reached for the formalising of a memorandum of understanding between the charity and the GHA which will enhance the services offered by the GHA. Prostate cancer is the second most common cancer and the leading cancer among men. While the incidence of prostate cancer has increased, fortunately so has the survival rate. The advancement in early detection and treatment is therefore of paramount importance. The forthcoming MoU will add physical resources and specialised training donated by Prostate Cancer Support Group to the GHA's Urology department. This is the perfect example of

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collaboration between the Government and the voluntary sector in terms of support and enhancement of services to benefit our community.

In November 2020 the GHA Domestic Abuse Working Group was constituted to formalise a process in the GHA to ensure that victims of abuse were identified, assessed and offered
915 appropriate support, including referral pathways, in line with Gibraltar's wider national strategy.

Finally on Health, Mr Speaker, I turn to mental health. I made it a key priority in the review of the GHA since I became the Minister less than a year ago to build on the unprecedented improvements already delivered by my predecessor Ministers for Health in our Government. Notwithstanding and in parallel to having to deal with the pandemic, at the end of last year I
920 commissioned a review of the service and the preparation of a National Strategic Plan by an external adviser. Additionally in the last couple of months a parallel programme of preparatory work and plans supported by other external experts in the development and delivery of the Mental Health Services to ensure that the service is ready to respond to the changes required to deliver the strategy. This has also included the provision of further training for our in-patient staff
925 in the application of the Mental Health Act – this has already taken place – and work is underway to finalise the development of the code of practice.

I am very keen to report on the progress that has been made since embarking on the commissioning of a National Mental Health Strategy for Gibraltar, which is now in its final stages, and we aim to complete and publish it in the coming weeks. However, in the meantime the Mental Health Services have not been sitting still, and as the part of the strategy we will see the following:
930 the launch of a listening and learning initiative that gives us the opportunity to better use the stories of patients and their relatives to help improve the services provided; the development of a new crisis pathway to improve access to services, provide immediate access where necessary, together with follow-up support; and an inter-agency initiative between the GHA, the Department of Education and the Care Agency to provide more co-ordinated support to children and younger
935 adults with mental health needs. There will be a lot more detail of our plans in the Mental Health Strategy once it is finalised and published. Throughout, we are committed to listening to the experience of people who use our services and help shape our plans as we implement them. Again, the patient is at the heart of our services.

I am pleased that in November 2020, we published the Mental Health Situational Analysis Report, which was commissioned from Public Health England. The report highlighted excellent progress to date with improvements to the physical environment, the Mental Health Act reforms and frontline response of our Mental Health Services in Gibraltar, as well as suggesting areas for further improvement, all of which the GHA has been actively progressing.
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The Mental Health Board plays a crucial role and has been actively supporting the development of our services by providing an independent critical eye through their visits and discussions with patients in Ocean Views, and I am immensely grateful for their work. They clearly and quite rightly identified a need for an improved range of activities and rehabilitation activities for patients during their stay in hospital. In response, we are launching a programme whereby there will be
945 ward-based staff with additional training and responsibilities to run ward-based activities. This will be further enhanced through a refocused and more structured approach to the delivery of occupational therapy treatments and a programme of ward-based daily living activities for patients in our rehabilitation ward.
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Finally, I intend to launch ongoing audits and a formal review process in respect of significant events and untoward incidents in Mental Health, in order that we can ensure that we have learnt and continue to learn lessons and incorporate these into our service transformation programme.
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Our Mental Health Services demonstrated great resilience and have coped with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, and our staff should be congratulated for their efforts.

Mr Speaker, as I now turn to my responsibilities in relation to the Care Agency I would like to say that health and social care is the cornerstone of our community and will always be a priority.
960 However, before I begin I would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the late Glynis Pearson, a much loved and valued member of our Disability Service, who sadly passed away in August 2019.

Her devotion and dedication to the service she managed was exemplary to all. She is greatly missed by staff, and especially the service users, who adored her and whom she adored.

965 Mr Carlos Banderas was appointed Chief Executive of the Care Agency in August 2020, Mr Angelo Cerisola was appointed Services Safety and Standards Director, and Ms Jennifer Poole was appointed Head of Adult Services in November 2020. Ms Sharon Ratcliffe was appointed COVID-19 Co-ordinator for the Care Agency at the start of the pandemic. My congratulations to all of them.

970 Turning to the Care Agency Disability Services, the advance of COVID-19 has certainly changed the way that Disability Services has supported adults with learning disabilities. Service users who would have attended St Bernadette's Centre were, like most others, staying home. The lockdown restrictions and lack of social contact were especially hard on people with learning disabilities, so they were supported to manage the challenges associated with the social lockdown by the
975 dedicated and caring team of professionals. The Care Agency's very skilled and experienced Specialist Occupational Therapist and Strategy Co-ordinator adapted service provision by the use of technology for long-distance healthcare. This meant wider outreach. The outreach was carried out with invaluable input from the Behaviour Support Officer, who was essential in supporting families. Instrumental tele-health provision was also implemented by the Learning Disability Social
980 Worker, who was in constant contact with service users and their families. In general, I am delighted to report that service users, families and staff have reported that the support offered has been useful and beneficial during these unprecedented times, and feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Service users' Wishes and Feelings meetings continue to take place on a regular basis with all units at St Bernadette's Resource Centre. However, the COVID-19 measures
985 have limited and restricted options available, for now.

Turning to the Care Agency's Adult Services, it continues to provide assessment, support and advice to all vulnerable people over the age of 18. During the 2019-20 financial year, Adult Services received 1,229 referrals for social work assessments and support, 31% of which were generated in the Hospital; 124 of these were in relation to safeguarding alerts and 20 in relation to domestic
990 abuse. These referrals are received not only from other professionals but also from the general public, either self-referrals or from relatives or neighbours who wish to raise concern about a possible vulnerable person. This represented an increase of 79, which is 6% on the previous year.

Referrals received during the 2020-21 financial year were 1,642. This represented an increase of 395 referrals from the previous year, which is 34%; 448 referrals were generated in hospital, an
995 increase of 16%, and 67 referrals were made in relation to safeguarding matters, a decrease of 46% on the previous year, and 25 referrals were made with regard to domestic abuse. The influx was received through the COVID helpline. During this period Adult Services also led in contacting all over-70s, conducting telephone surveys for each and every individual and carried out over 500 home visits for people who were not contactable over the telephone. Adult Services ensured that
1000 all vulnerable adults were supported during this difficult period with shopping, collection of prescriptions, and meals on wheels, as well as providing practical support, advice and information on a daily basis. Domiciliary care continues to be provided to assist the vulnerable, elderly or infirm at home. From April 2019 to March 2020 a total of 558 individuals received domiciliary care. This rose by 15% for the following year to a total of 643 individuals.

1005 Unfortunately, Waterport Terraces day centre had to be closed in March 2020 in order to ensure the safety of all the elderly clients. Throughout the COVID period, day centre staff were unable to attend physically but they provided outreach support, calling to enquire as to clients' general well-being on a regular basis and carrying out home visits to provide activity packs to keep them engaged and stimulated at home. I cannot emphasise enough the magnificent work that has
1010 been undertaken by the Care Agency to support the needs of our vulnerable community.

Looking at safeguarding adults at risk, as we continue to enhance practice, legislation is being drafted to establish the Safeguarding Adult Board as a statutory body in order to ensure the safeguarding of adults at risk is made a priority for stakeholder organisations. Training on

1015 safeguarding adults is being delivered today as I speak – well, maybe not now, Mr Speaker, as it is a bit late in the day, but it commenced this morning.

Turning to Children’s Services, the Family and Community Centre has been instrumental in ensuring that children and young people, parents and carers, can access support. The Care Agency has worked hard at creating meaningful ties with the community and combatting any residual stigma associated with Social Services. Families are now more amenable to receiving support from the social work team and this service has been instrumental in bridging the gap between child protection and children in need and crucial in providing children and families with increased opportunities to succeed and achieve the best possible outcomes.

1020 The Care Agency has worked hard to reduce the number of children who have had to be placed in residential care – a significant improvement, increasingly supporting families to care for children and young people, with the support of their own Fostering and Adoption social worker, with support and guidelines around issues of contact, finances and support in their family placements.

1025 In Children’s Residential Services the Care Agency has care plans in place for every child. These are prepared in conjunction with therapists and social workers, are understood by the care teams and help to provide clarity to everyone in the service about the standards expected in the care that they provide to our most vulnerable children.

1030 The Care Agency is working together with the Royal Gibraltar Police in achieving a joint protocol to work with young people in care who may also be known to the criminal justice system. Additionally, the Care Agency chairs a multi-agency working group on youth offending to develop strategies on how to best offer support.

1035 A Parent and Child Assessment Unit has been created. The aim of this service has been to provide residential parent and child assessments for those who are suffering or are at risk of suffering significant harm and on Child Protection Plans. Residential support encourages parents to reflect on their parenting and the impact that this may have on their children, and at the same time ensuring that the child’s needs are being met in a safe and healthy environment. The programme helps parents build on their parenting skills and adopt positive strategies in their day-to-day parenting responsibilities. The centre has workers engaged in providing the significant number of supervised contacts that are currently being requested by the courts.

1040 Also, the Freedom Programme for victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse is running from the Family Centre as a group session, which is a significant step forward for the service in supporting men and women who have suffered domestic abuse.

1045 Looking at our leaving care service, the Children’s Service continues to have a personal adviser service for young children leaving care. Support is offered up to the age of 25 to those who are either in residential care, in supported accommodation or living independently in the community, and the role of the personal adviser has been crucial in supporting young people’s transition into independent living and having someone they can rely on, when necessary.

1050 Children with disabilities are among the most vulnerable in any society. This year’s main focus has been on increasing and developing respite services, so that support can be provided in the shortest time possible. Encouragingly, 2020-21 has seen the provision of care afforded to children with disabilities and their families increased. Part of a range of services which support children in need and their families has included the provision of day, evening and weekend activities for children.

1055 Finally on children, the Child Protection Committee has continued to ensure safeguarding is embedded in practices and procedures across services for children in Gibraltar. During the financial year 2019-20, 216 individuals have been trained in Safeguarding Tier 1, 30 in Tier 2 and Safeguarding Training Tier 3 was also successfully delivered by the GHA and supported by Care Agency practitioners. Additionally, all new RGP recruits received safeguarding training as part of their induction programme.

1060 Turning to the Care Agency’s Therapeutic Services, these services have supported staff and service users with individual and/or group counselling during the pandemic. This included those returning to work after having contracted the virus, and, if requested, as part of post-traumatic

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stress healing. Given the stresses arising from the nature of their work, services were extended to the GHA and ERS as well as Care Agency members of staff. The Therapeutic team continues to offer Care Agency clients, Care Agency colleagues and other colleagues with multi-agency teams such as the Royal Gibraltar Police, the GHA, the Department of Education, Youth Services, Her Majesty's Prison Service and the GSLA a range of specific therapeutic and professional expertise and support. The Care Agency's Therapeutic team also provides support and supervision to Bruce's Farm, both in respect of residents undergoing drug and alcohol treatment and the staff members who care for them.

There has also been inter-agency consultation. Between April 2020 and March 2021 the Therapeutic Services team have, through their MAPPA duties, been involved in monthly meetings with the RGP and multi-agency teams. A total of 108 clinical hours have been attributed to MAPPA.

On that note, Mr Speaker, I turn to my Justice portfolio, commencing with the Royal Gibraltar Police. Following the 2019 HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) inspection of the Royal Gibraltar Police and the report submitted in 2020, the RGP continues to work hard at a strategic level to achieve the recommendations set out. Chaired monthly by the Commissioner of Police, Richard Ullger, and attended by the Command Team, together with members of the Gibraltar Police Authority and HMICFRS, they strategically discuss progress and implementation. As a result of this, there has been a lot of work to establish a Domestic Abuse Unit and a Victims of Crime Unit to better co-ordinate the public protection delivery of the service. The Service has provided much training to the entire force and its new approach has provided the public with greater confidence to report matters of domestic abuse.

The Code of Ethics has also been well established, with good processes in place to support the principles and improve standards of behaviour, with policies adopted and implemented to target those who may engage in any corrupt practice. More training is envisaged and improved systems will be implemented at a cost to improve governance and accountability.

National security continues to be a priority for the RGP and this is evidenced by the commitments aligned to the Annual Policing Plan. The recent Terrorism Act 2019 provides the RGP with broad and intrusive powers to stop, search and hold individuals at entry points into Gibraltar, providing the RGP with the ability to investigate potential plots of acts of terrorism and support other states in such investigations. The enforcement of this Act has already commenced with Project Servator, a policing tactic carried out by specially trained officers who deter and detect criminal and terrorist activity, as well as to reassure the public. Through these methods the RGP have already been successful in detaining drug suppliers, wanted persons and illegal immigrants. Simultaneously, the RGP has also invested in its firearms command structure and now has the capacity and capability to command a firearms incident at a strategic, tactical and operational level.

There are notable cases of interest as the RGP officers are constantly at the forefront of fighting crime that occurs both nationally and internationally, and there have been many success stories over the past year. The RGP's efforts in combatting drug trafficking, in line with the Commissioner's commitment when taking office to do so, has been notable this year. Drug suppliers have been arrested and convicted, with forfeitures made of moneys suspected to have been collected in the commission of the offence. Large seizures of drugs have been made, with the largest happening in January of this year, with a total of 1.3 tonnes of cannabis resin recovered, having a street value of approximately £6½ million. This was equally matched on the same night in a joint operation with Spanish law enforcement agencies, and the seizure of 1.8 tonnes of cannabis resin. In February 2021, £2 million worth of cocaine was seized. Equally, offenders escaping our local jurisdiction have been arrested through the European Arrest Warrant Framework and some excellent co-operation has resulted, particularly with the national police forces of the Kingdom of Spain, to bring these people to justice. Under the current framework, policing co-operation continues.

The Economic Crime Unit, which was recently resourced with more officers, has increasingly been investigating complex crimes, arresting offenders for false accounting, fraud, money laundering and frauds by false accounting.

1120 In March this year the RGP created a Traffic Enforcement Unit that dealt with exceptionally bad driving linked to anti-social behaviour. By having a co-ordinated response the RGP has proactively enforced the laws on the roads with zero tolerance towards offences that put other road users in danger.

1125 In September 2020 the RGP was recognised by GibSams for its hard work to improve mental health well-being in the service. This has had a positive impact on staff and officers. Importantly also, a diversity, equality and inclusion strategy was adopted by the RGP in February 2021. This is being adopted from recruitment into retention, ensuring that the service is a diverse one. Only recently the RGP made history by promoting its first woman inspector.

1130 Mr Speaker, I turn now to the Gibraltar Financial Intelligence Unit (GFIU), which also plays a critical role in the fight against economic crime and also uses financial intelligence to tackle other criminal conduct. As it marks 25 years since its establishment, the GFIU has undergone a restructure, and as a result of the recommendations made by the Council of Europe Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (Moneyval), Mr Edgar Lopez, a former senior police officer, was appointed as its director by the Attorney General in March 2020 and oversees a permanent core of financial intelligence officers and other staff, together with specialist officers on secondment from the Royal Gibraltar Police, HM Customs and the Gambling Division. To co-ordinate the intelligence available to the GFIU, it established a Joint Financial Intelligence Task Group to discuss financial intelligence and disclosures received by the GFIU where complex cases might be investigated. The group meets weekly and has proved to be a very efficient mechanism, bringing all stakeholders together to make better-informed decisions.

1140 Last year the GFIU launched an e-learning platform that it designed and provides service users with the latest information through e-learning workshops. The numerous achievements over the last year demonstrates the efforts made to professionalise the unit.

1145 In January 2019 the GFIU launched an online reporting system for the secure submission of suspicious activity reports. The system, called THEMIS, consists of two separate parts – an online portal for use by MLROs and a system visible only to the GFIU. It has also integrated all mutual legal assistance requests into the system, which allows officers to cross check with existing data. This allows the GFIU to harvest the data and link any potential local money laundering investigations.

1150 Officers continue to undertake regular online training to be able to improve their conduct in their roles. The e-learning workshops have increased over the last year with over 300 users having access to them. Feedback on both the initiatives and workshop content offered by the GFIU has been very encouraging. More workshops are being designed, which will include terrorist financing, online child sexual abuse and exploitation, and human trafficking. The GFIU has engaged with industry professionals, international institutions and academics to ensure that the content and design of these workshops are optimised to provide the most up-to-date information. The GFIU has been very actively involved in international forums.

1160 Now, Mr Speaker, I turn to our law courts. The law courts have not escaped the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic but the Gibraltar Courts Service has worked extraordinarily hard to keep the courts open and operating throughout both lockdown periods. The use of the video-link facility with HM Prison increased, remote hearings for civil matters in the Supreme Court were introduced and the Court of Appeal sessions have been conducted remotely.

1165 There are currently five appointed members of the Court of Appeal, with the recruitment of a further member imminent in order to maintain the complement at six. Last year, on advice from the Judicial Service Commission, eight new Justices of the Peace were recruited, appointed and sworn-in. Again, this is to maintain the complement of Justices following a number of retirements. In 2019, acting on advice from the Judicial Service Commission, Mr Justice Yeats and Mr Justice

Restano were appointed Puisne Judges of the Supreme Court. The law courts are in a strong position. The current complement of judges, coupled with the fact that when hit with the pandemic there was no backlog in either the Magistrates' or Supreme Courts, has enabled it to deal effectively with the current substantial workload brought about as a result of the scaling down of operations during both lockdown periods.

As Minister for Justice, I have worked closely with the Chief Executive of the Gibraltar Courts Service to ensure that the courts' back office administration is properly resourced and to make certain that the level of support to the judiciary, court users and the legal profession is maintained so as to continue delivering a timely and efficient justice system that is open to all.

I turn to the Government's Law Officers, a team who have continued to play a crucial part in shaping legislation, providing legal representation and delivering legal advice to Government and Departments. During the course of 2020 to date, the GLO have published the following legislation: 40 Bills, 26 Acts and 830 legal notices.

In January 2020 the Government published the legislation that provided the framework of Gibraltar's exit from the European Union. Since the enactment of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2019, a significant number of regulations have been published using the powers conferred by that Act, which have been aimed at correcting deficiencies that have arisen as a result of Brexit. Others have been made pursuant to the obligations entered into in the Withdrawal Agreement. Another aspect of Brexit relates to trade, where we, on 1st January 2021, published 27 sets of regulations to give effect to the rollover.

The Competition Bill was also published in December 2020. Following its enactment, a further eight sets of regulations and orders have been published, which, taken as a whole, provide for a competition regime for Gibraltar that is based on the post-Brexit regime applicable to the UK.

In addition to dealing with the legislative impact of Brexit, there has been, as we know, a significant amount of COVID-related legislation enacted, principally under the Civil Contingencies Act. Since we first legislated for COVID by declaring it to be an infectious disease, on 31st January 2020, there have been, as I said earlier, over 300 COVID regulations.

Other than Brexit and COVID, the following legislative projects have also come to fruition during this period. The Marriage (Amendment) Act deleted section 6B of the Marriage Act, which provided for registrars to opt out of conducting a same-sex marriage in the exercise of their freedom of conscience. Importantly, the Surrogacy Act 2021 came into force on 9th February and provides for the regulation of surrogacy arrangements and the legal status of those participating in assisted reproduction arrangements. One of the many regulations resulting from the passing of that Act amended the Births and Deaths Registration Rules to allow for the recording of information in a birth entry relating to a woman who is a parent in accordance with section 9 of the Surrogacy Act, making it possible for two women to be named on a birth certificate.

The Department has also been engaged in the area of international conventions, including Brexit, of course, and the Moneyval assessment on Gibraltar.

And finally on that note, Mr Speaker, it leads me to mention the work done on the Anti-Corruption Authority. Yes, Mr Speaker, this was, of course, a manifesto commitment, but that commitment has not been possible in the timeframe stated in the manifesto, for obvious reasons. What has been happening in Gibraltar for the last year and a half, and indeed the whole of the world, has meant that some things have taken precedence over others, but I can assure the Hon. Mr Clinton, given that he raised this issue only a moment ago, that I have been working on this matter in addition to my commitments to COVID and everything else. I have been working on this matter directly with the Chief Minister and also with Minister Isola, and a draft Bill is at a very advanced stage. Indeed, I received the latest draft about a week ago and the Bill will be before this House this calendar year, COVID permitting.

Mr Speaker, I turn now to the Office of Criminal Prosecution and Litigation (OCPL). This too was heavily involved in the initial and ongoing Moneyval evaluation, forming part of the Gibraltar delegation at the various Strasbourg-Gibraltar meetings. Arising from this, OCPL has also been

involved in the process leading to the amendments that have recently been made to the Proceeds of Crimes Act.

1220 During the height of the COVID pandemic the OCPL staff were seconded to deal with matters related to BEAT payments. Notwithstanding this and most of the department needing to isolate due to positive members of staff, the OCPL nevertheless covered all court appearances and urgent matters throughout the lockdown period.

1225 The OCPL has noted a marked increase in the number of sexual offences matters that are being investigated and prosecuted. This would seem to suggest that there is a marked and increased confidence in the judicial process as a whole in dealing with this type of case, whether they are historic or recent allegations.

1230 Mr Speaker, I now turn to Her Majesty's Prison. The average daily population for the last two financial years stood at 48, which is a slight drop from the average. On 18th September 2019 Mr Gareth Coom was promoted to Prison Superintendent. Having worked with Gareth for a number of years, and more closely in the last year and a half, I want to thank him for his dedication to the service that he leads and for all his help, especially during these recent unprecedented times.

1235 Unfortunately, 2020 began not only with the threat of the oncoming pandemic but, sadly, with the passing of two members of staff, Officers Zac Valance and Diana Senior.

1240 The Prison services continued to be well used by those in custody as the year progressed, with all of these seeing a higher percentage of users. They attended educational classes, made use of the gymnasium and attended vocational classes. In terms of spiritual support, ministers of the various religious denominations visited the Prison weekly and offered guidance in addition to a kind ear, and in fact religious attendances were up to 35% of the population.

1245 The senior management team and staff devised a series of fluid protocols to safeguard Her Majesty's Prison during the pandemic, initiatives and regimes that would serve them well throughout the year. In retrospect, the ability to effortlessly adapt to changes in advice marked the difference between success and failure in these confined circumstances and in the end saw the service traverse this very difficult period with only a single COVID case.

1250 At present, the Prison Service continues to follow their road map to normality, re-establishing services and renewing initiatives and improvements to current ones, including an increase in the provision of general and substance abuse counselling and rehabilitation. Improving these services will better place offenders on the road to rehabilitation and successful re-integration into society and thus reduce the rate of re-offending. This is something that I am working very closely with the Superintendent of the Prison on because experience tells us that the most effective drug strategy combines both elements of counselling and rehabilitation programmes, which are provided together with the enforcement and deterrence. To this end, and in order to enhance the enforcement and deterrence element, the Prison Service is extremely proud to report at present a 55% participation in their voluntary drug testing scheme.

1255 Other areas that have received attention over the last two years include improvements to infrastructure and equipment. The Prison gymnasium was completely refurbished. An investment has also been made in the main yard with the repair to the ground and the purchase of equipment.

1260 Upcoming specialist training in the United Kingdom will include control and restraint and multi-disciplinary team training for instructors.

The Prison management and the treatment of prisoners continue to be seen by the Statutory Prison Board, members of which undertake their responsibilities with passion and determination.

1265 Mr Speaker, the Probation Services have continued to provide frontline services during the pandemic to both the courts by way of pre-sentence reports and to the Parole Board for consideration for parole and community supervision orders. Probation officers have received further training in MAPPA sex offender risk assessment, management and supervision. Additionally, one of the probation officers undertook training in the Freedom Programme for victims who have been physically or emotionally abused by their partners. Whilst the programme focuses on working with the victims of domestic abuse, the programme will enable probation

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1275 officers to work with perpetrators of domestic abuse as part of probation supervision. The programme challenges the rationalising and justification that perpetrators employ for their abuse. It is designed to make perpetrators accept responsibility and teach them appropriate behaviours with their partners. Probation officers will be undertaking further training to facilitate the incorporation of domestic abuse into public protection risk management.

1280 Mr Speaker, I turn to the last of the uniformed bodies that I have responsibility for, and that is the Fire Service. Starting with the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS), this has also, for them, been a year of continued progress and adaptation to new challenges. The GFRS has continued during COVID with its primary objective of providing the best possible level of emergency response to the community whilst negotiating the challenges brought about by COVID-19. Notably, one of the members of staff at GFRS was seconded to the COVID-19 Mental Health and Well-being Team and since his return to GFRS continues to carry out invaluable work under their welfare support system, and is currently working on a project to introduce an internal support network and increase mental health first aid and awareness amongst the workforce.

1285 The GFRS has seen multi-agency major incident exercises on real-time practical events with significant involvement at all levels of the command and control structure. Following the lead from the Gibraltar Contingency Council, this is an ongoing process of development and definitely one that will vastly improve interoperability and the overall efficiency of Gibraltar's emergency response capability.

1290 The gym facilities were refurbished last year by the firefighters themselves. As a result of this voluntary work, expenditure has been significantly reduced and they now have a facility that contributes towards maintenance of an acceptable level of physical equipment amongst the crews, something that is of obvious value to their operations.

1295 The GFRS senior management is in the process of preparing proposals for the introduction of a dedicated training department and I now turn also to the Airport Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS), which despite the constraints of the pandemic has maintained a particularly busy period of activity. With an unusually quiet airfield, the focus was to consolidate all elements of practical training and reviewing operational procedures. This was undertaken observing the relevant protective measures for the safety of all staff members, ensuring preparedness for response could be maintained whilst remaining conscious of a potential need to support other agencies if circumstances so required. Continual training ensures that firefighters maintain the necessary skills and competences which are critical to safely and effectively fulfil their roles. This at a time ensures that as an organisation the AFRS functions properly and can react whenever it is called for. Consequently, it is mandatory for the entire AFRS complement to be recertified every four years and will now happen in October 2021.

1310 The UK Civil Aviation Authority undertook an organisational preparedness audit in June 2020. This was undertaken virtually and resulted in a clean bill of health with only relatively minor observations having been highlighted. This now provides an assurance that the AFRS is fully prepared to respond to any operational demands that may be placed upon it, not only at the airfield but elsewhere in Gibraltar in support of the GFRS or any other emergency service.

1315 The GFRS and AFRS continue to work closely, fostering a great professional working relationship. This demonstrates a mutual commitment to promote interoperability in respect of both training and operational responses to support each other during any incident. This collaborative approach serves to identify performance improvement, cost effectiveness and other synergies which satisfy common gains in all aspects of firefighting and training, with the benefits ultimately resulting in a safer Gibraltar.

1320 One final note, on the basis of the stark underrepresentation of women in the Fire Services. I recently met with the chiefs from GFRS and AFRS and I have set up a working group to promote equal opportunities both in recruitment and, hopefully, in retention of a diversity of firefighters in Gibraltar.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I turn to my portfolio as Minister for Equality. During our decade in office it has been my privilege to have held a wide range of portfolios. Of all those portfolios there has

1325 been one that I have held from the very first day, and that is Equality. I was extremely honoured to be chosen as Gibraltar's first Minister for Equality in 2011 and it is a responsibility that I continue to be very proud of. This Ministry which I lead is dedicated to upholding equality principles and to eliminating all forms of discrimination. It has been and continues to be greatly rewarding to form and lead a new Ministry which has been ground-breaking in its vision, ideas, policies and, most significantly, legislation.

1330 I will start with LGBTQ+ rights. I am grateful for the Chief Minister's comments on gay rights in his intervention yesterday and the importance he has given this issue and the recognition of the work of the Ministry for Equality, because in the space of just under 10 years a great deal has been achieved by our administration in order to ensure that gay rights are properly protected by legislation. In fact, it is incredible now to think that the first time the word 'gay' was mentioned in Parliament was not that long ago and it was in my very first Budget speech in 2012. This
1335 Government stands for fairness and equality and I am very proud that since 2011 we began to address the issue of gay rights, an issue which had never been directly mentioned, let alone addressed, in this House before, and we have done so promptly and with conviction. This has marked a fundamental change in values and has ensured that all members of our community enjoy the same rights.

1340 There are many ways to protect the rights of our citizens. Clearly, passing legislation is one of the most important steps that we can take. Nevertheless, it is also vitally important to continue to raise awareness of LGBTQ+ matters to ensure that any kind of discrimination is not allowed to take root in our community. It was very important for this Government to again mark Pride Month this June because representation and visibility matter and sometimes much more than we can
1345 ever imagine. This year we have marked Pride in a number of bright and illuminating ways. Pride flags have been flown from key buildings and points in Gibraltar. Pedestrian crossing signals at a number of crossings have been changed in order to reflect the diversity in our community. Unfortunately, some of the comments on social media in response to our initiatives this year have shown a blatant disregard for our fellow citizens. There is no place in Gibraltar for homophobia and hate, and I would urge everyone to remember that we are all equal and that we all deserve
1350 and are entitled to full respect at all times.

While visibility is key, an equally critical component of this journey is to listen to the voices and concerns of the LGBTQ+ community. For this very reason we launched the first survey in Gibraltar. The survey will be live until 31st September and I would urge everyone from the LGBTQ+
1355 community to participate. Hearing directly from stakeholders is vital in a democratic society that upholds the key values of equality, diversity and inclusion.

Our Government's commitment to equality is embedded in everything that we do. Gender equality is another important strand of my equality portfolio. I believe most resolutely that gender equality is a vital component of a modern and mature society and it is a key factor in our quest for
1360 social justice. In 2020 we marked International Women's Day with a Women in STEM panel discussion event, days before we went into our first lockdown. The event aimed to raise the profile of women working in STEM locally as a means of providing young people, particularly girls and young women, with positive role models. Looking back now, the event almost seems prophetic given the pivotal and central role that was to be played by scientists and healthcare professionals
1365 during the pandemic. In 2021, we marked International Women's Day by recognising and celebrating the extraordinary efforts and crucial role of women in health and care during the COVID crisis with an extensive social media campaign. This was in keeping with the United Nations theme 'Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a COVID-19 World' and it was particularly fitting that we celebrated International Women's Day 2021 in this way, given that in
1370 Gibraltar women comprise over 70% of the health and care workforce. As Minister for Health and as Minister with responsibility for Civil Contingencies I have repeatedly witnessed first-hand the truly incredible efforts of women at the forefront in fighting the coronavirus pandemic. I have nothing but admiration, respect and a huge sense of gratitude for all their endeavours in eradicating the virus from our community.

1375 Another intrinsic part of our gender equality strategy is challenging gender stereotypes. These
are often deeply embedded in societies to the point that they are not recognised as such but are
regrettably considered to be natural and form part of expected behaviours. There can often be a
backlash against any initiatives that are perceived to challenge this status quo. Backlashes do not
deter me from working to eradicate stereotypes that I know prove damaging and in most extreme
1380 cases can even be fatal. That is why we must challenge the insistent and persistent use of hyper-
feminine and hyper-masculine stereotypes. They do not reflect the full spectrum of human
experience and they serve to strictly police the behaviours of men and women and of people who
do not identify as such. To this effect we launched a modern fairy tales short story competition in
November 2019, a resounding success. Not only was the Fireside Chat event, to discuss gender
1385 stereotypes in traditional fairy tales, delivered to a packed audience but the actual competition
itself was phenomenally supported by 140 participants and 151 entries. Clearly, there is an
appetite in Gibraltar for changing limited gender stereotypes and I know that the competition has
served to generate a conversation around the issue.

Another strand of the gender equality strategy is the economic empowerment of women. One
1390 of the key initiatives to do this is our Women's Mentorship Programme, of which we have already
run two cycles, and we would have launched the third cycle in 2020 but obviously the pandemic
did not allow for this. Nevertheless, I look forward to announcing the launch of the third cycle
imminently and would like to urge anyone interested in participating in the Women's Mentorship
Programme, either as a mentor or a mentee, to contact the Ministry of Equality and to register.

1395 Another key issue which is at the forefront of my equality agenda is domestic abuse. Domestic
abuse is one of the highest priorities for our Government and you will have seen, Mr Speaker,
from my address, that it is now a common theme running through the majority of the
Departments for which I am responsible. As Minister for Justice and Equality I am extremely aware
that making legislation for changes is a powerful way forward in eradicating domestic abuse and
1400 it is also important to pave the way for new laws with training so that it is put into effect properly.
While domestic abuse affects everyone, statistics show that it affects women predominantly.
Therefore, I published a Command Paper for a Bill specifically dedicated to offences relating to
domestic abuse. This landmark, standalone and consolidated piece of legislation seeks to enshrine
in law the protection of victims of domestic abuse. The two most fundamental changes that this
1405 piece of legislation will introduce will be a definition of domestic abuse in statute and the
introduction of domestic abuse protection notices and orders. These notices and orders will
provide new tools for the RGP and the courts. They prohibit abuse and may prohibit contact or
stop the person going within a certain distance of a victim's home. Additionally, the Government
is widening the definition of domestic abuse to include non-physical, economic abuse and
1410 controlling and coercive behaviour, as part of developing the National Strategy. All these
additional legislative measures will serve to enhance the protection of victims of domestic abuse
and they will also serve to send a very powerful message to the perpetrators and the wider
community that this Government is committed to eradicating this grave social issue.

The Government was acutely aware of the likelihood of an increased risk of domestic abuse
1415 during the COVID period, and as such the National Strategy was brought into sharper focus. During
the lockdown period a specific COVID-19 Domestic Abuse Working Group, made up of
professionals from all stakeholder Departments and which also included a representative from
Women in Need, was appointed.

Enhancing the knowledge and skills of our first responders is also a top priority for the
1420 Government and I have been working closely with the Commissioner of Police to ensure that the
RGP's skills and knowledge in this highly sensitive area are enhanced. I am delighted to report that
in spite of the challenges of the recent months, in 2020 all 250 officers of the Royal Gibraltar Police
were trained by the UK charity SafeLives to deal with domestic abuse. The aims of the training
were to enhance policing response to the victims of domestic abuse, the identification of
1425 perpetrators of domestic abuse and prevention measures and to ensure that the Police were
properly prepared ahead of the forthcoming legislation. In addition to the RGP officers,

professionals from other relevant Departments such as the Probation Service, the Care Agency and the GHA, were also able to benefit from the training and were able to gain the necessary skills and knowledge to assist in future training courses.

1430 The Ministry for Equality also commissioned training on the Freedom Programme, which is a very successful therapeutic programme for victims of domestic abuse, in order that they may be provided with a supportive, safe and friendly environment. Training on the Freedom Programme was delivered to the heads of all key stakeholder Departments that form part of the National Domestic Abuse Strategy and which deliver therapeutic and support services to victims of
1435 domestic abuse. This was done with a view to establishing a consistent and holistic policy in the delivery of such therapies throughout Gibraltar. The Freedom Programme has been very successfully used by the Care Agency since 2014 and it was important to expand it throughout the public sector so that it could have a wider reach.

I am also very happy to report that apart from the training there are frequent multi-agency
1440 meetings between the Care Agency, the GHA and the RGP to address issues relating to domestic abuse. Our preventative strategy continues to work well through our collaborative relationships with the Department of Education, too. 'Respect and Healthy Relationships' continues to be delivered across schools in Gibraltar in age-appropriate and sensitive ways.

The Ministry for Equality's work on disabilities has always been the lion's share of the work
1445 that we do and we have advanced greatly in the last 10 years. This last year has been difficult for all of us and it has been particularly sad for me to see that a lot of the good work and awareness raised by the Ministry of Equality has had to be put on hold due to lockdown measures. This is particularly true of the training and awareness programmes that they deliver, and a lot of time and effort had been invested in preparing for them, but even throughout the lockdown the
1450 Ministry of Equality were an important element of this Government's policymaking decision on matters of disability.

Since my last Budget speech the Ministry of Equality has also attended training and attended two Annual Conferences on the Rights of People with Disabilities organised by the Academy of European Law. The aim of this is that through learning we can continue to enhance the services
1455 that the Government provides.

The Disability Language and Etiquette Customer Care training that already forms part of the training prospectus for Civil Servants has also been included as part of the ongoing training for the Royal Gibraltar Police. Indeed, a number of training sessions for the RGP were already delivered before they had to be postponed due to COVID, and we are hoping they can be reinstated soon.

1460 We launched disability information cards, the purpose of which is to establish a discreet way for a person with a disability to communicate with others what their particular accessibility needs may be. This scheme is purely voluntary. We now have close to a hundred card holders and I am happy to say that these cards were especially useful during lockdown on occasions where people with particular disabilities were allowed to enjoy certain necessities due to their condition. For
1465 example, children with particular requirements due to their disability could use this card successfully in order to gain access to the park at Europa Point during lockdown. You may remember, Mr Speaker, that on occasions during spring 2020 time spent on the beach was limited to half an hour. This time limit was extended for people who, because of their disability, needed some extra time, and the disability information card proved to be a very simple and effective way
1470 to prove this to the authorities.

The importance of an accessible toilet cannot and should not be underestimated. For some people, lack of such access means restrictive participation in social and cultural activities. This is why we launched the RADAR Key pilot scheme in October 2019 and installed our first RADAR lock. For those people who are unaware, a RADAR key opens any door that has a RADAR lock. These
1475 are usually installed in public accessible toilets and will allow a RADAR key holder access to the toilets at all times. These are the types of initiatives that create a more accessible social environment and therefore make a real difference to people with disabilities. Applications for a RADAR key should be made to the Ministry for Equality.

1480 I would also like to point out another example of how this Government is taking the concept
of equality and inclusion and adapting it into our policies: the award-winning B-tween Bench
designed by Gamma Architects to include a space, off centre, in order to allow wheelchair users
to sit amongst friends or families. Both Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar and private entities
have made use of this inclusive design as part of the development of outside public areas.

1485 Finally on disability, while we have achieved and progressed a lot in terms of legislation and
policies, training and awareness, we have more and big exciting plans ahead. Consultation with
stakeholders is, of course, essential so that we be kept abreast of all live issues, and the Ministry
for Equality in the coming weeks will launch an in-depth consultation to see how we can further
improve our services.

1490 Now that I have been given the responsibility for Health and Social Services it makes it so much
easier to be able to discharge and integrate the general equality principles in relation to disability
in a more seamless way. I have regular meetings with all my heads of Departments together, so
that in consultation the Medical Director, the Department of Equality and the Chief Executive of
the Care Agency can work together in a more meaningful and more collective way.

1495 To conclude, Mr Speaker, I will mention my responsibilities in the context of the
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Having been a founder member of the British
Islands Mediterranean Region's Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Women
Parliamentarians, I was elected chair in the middle of the pandemic. That has brought with it
additional responsibilities. I am grateful for the travel ban this year and having adapted to virtual
meetings has been very effective; otherwise, I would have had to invest a lot of time travelling.
1500 Mr Speaker, as you and Mr Clerk know full well, our participation in the CPA can sometimes send
us to far-flung corners of the earth.

This being Mr Martinez's last Budget session, please may I thank him, but may I thank him in
particular for his support of our CPA work, which involves travel – or should I more accurately say
sometimes adventures, because when one travels very far away things are not always simple.
1505 Most notably I might take this opportunity to remind him of that strange hotel in Istanbul, or the
event when the Hon. Mr Reyes was mugged in Cameroon, and all sorts of strange things that have
happened to us. But I would like to sincerely thank Mr Martinez before his retirement, as of
course, Mr Speaker, I would like to thank you and all the staff here in Parliament.

That leaves me to thank everyone else who has worked with me and supported me, in the last
1510 18 months especially as they have been particularly hard. Everyone who has worked with me
directly has literally worked round the clock. The hours put in by the teams have been
tremendous, and looking back now I do not know where we got the energy from to keep going.
But quite apart from the importance of what we were doing, it was clearly the camaraderie that
kept us going, from us as Ministers with the leadership of the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief
1515 Minister and my friend and colleague the Minister for Public Health, to all our teams, especially
those in the Civil Contingencies Office.

I am so happy that the efforts of those who work in the field of health and care have been
recognised. On that note, before I wrap up I must apologise for some of the policy work that has
been the victim of COVID. There was policy work that we embarked on before the pandemic struck
1520 and which we have not yet been able to complete. The reason for this is simply because all our
resources and all our attention were diverted to the pandemic and there were simply not any
more hours left in the day, some days. There is nothing I would like more than to complete these
as soon as time permits.

1525 Finally, as we see the rise in cases attributed to the delta variant, as a community it is important
that we keep safe. We must follow all the Public Health rules and the Public Health advice to keep
ourselves safe, and also it is important that we do not overburden the Hospital and residential
facilities. Our vulnerable people come first and it is for them that we need to make these sacrifices.

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

1530 **Hon. Chief Minister:** Mr Speaker, I am conscious that we have now heard a number of speeches on the go and that neither you nor the Clerk have been able to leave the Chamber. I wonder whether this might be a convenient moment to adjourn for 10 minutes for a comfort break before we continue with the next speech.

1535 The next one on the agenda would have been Minister Balban. Because he is solitary with his family, in isolation because of a close contact, his speech is now being circulated to all Members – in particular to Mr Phillips, who shadows him in a number of different portfolios – and will be available on the Government website and on the Parliament website as part of the *Hansard*.

I propose that we should now recess and continue with the order after Minister Balban.

Mr Speaker: The House will now recess until 25 past seven.

*The House recessed at 7.15 p.m.
and resumed its sitting at 7.25 p.m.*

**Appropriation Bill 2021 –
Second Reading –
Debate continued**

1540 *The following is the written speech of the Minister for Transport (Hon. P J Balban):*

1545 ‘Mr Speaker, never before have we needed to focus so much of our attention and resources on something so unexpected as what we have had to endure for close to two years now. At the time, I was leading the GHA when news of the new virus broke out in China. We looked to the east. The news kept pouring in of so much infection and death as a result of this virus but we somehow seemed to look at this as something that was happening far away and would perhaps not affect us. Patient zero was our wake-up call to the stark reality that we were not immune to this medical threat, and by then the GHA and Government in general had undertaken to be well prepared to take on this formidable opponent. Every reasonable step had been taken, every scenario rehearsed, every preparation done, just to be ready to endure a medical crisis unseen before in Gibraltar. We braced ourselves but we were confident that we were ahead of the game.

1550 Gibraltar in many respects was thrust into the limelight and was featured in the world media for many reasons. Our small size saw us break many records, sometimes for being top of the league table for positive reasons, at other times for not so positive reasons, but all in all we have been an example and a success story throughout most areas and we have shone out and managed to steer this ship away from the rocks. We are all hugely proud of the efforts made, the endless hours spent by our professionals, but especially the tireless work carried out by healthcare workers and the Civil Service at large, who have had to fill gaps when necessary and carry out duties not within their normal daily duties, proving that they are all truly able to reach that mark and prove that their skills are transferable wherever they may be needed. We are not out of the woods yet and prudence and good sense are necessary to see us through the coming months, as more cases, mainly attributable to the highly contagious delta variant of the virus, continue to spread – the virus trying to outwit us, its host, and fight itself to survive through mutation. It has been a massive challenge and I was proud to lead the GHA at the time of the first wave, working with this incredible organisation.

1560 Following the recent partial reshuffle, I returned to the portfolio that I was entrusted with originally in 2011 when we won the election. At the time I did not know that I would become so passionate about the work that was to follow and how important this would become in our fight to create a better environment for us all. In fact, the fight for a healthier community, and indeed planet, runs parallel to many lessons learnt during this pandemic. Evidence showed that people

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who were obese, for example, suffered greater risk of morbidity and indeed mortality. The lockdowns brought many people out of their homes in search of respite – this came about in the form of exercise – and in doing so also acquiring that hugely valuable vitamin D from the sun which proved so important as a contributing protective factor for our immune systems.

1575 I am truly grateful to be able to continue this work in the short time left until the next election. The amount of work necessary to carry out to put Gibraltar on track is so vast that it will take many years to truly see a difference, a difference that depends on change and our ability to change as a people and see that we need to evolve if we are to stand the best chance of passing on a greener, healthier Gibraltar to our children. This will be all about trying to offer truly alternative and
1580 sustainable choices of moving and finding ways to encourage less car usage via perhaps more palatable means, safer roads for all, liveable streets – something that we should, I am sure, all wish for, regardless of our political background, and something that I hope will receive the support of all Members of this House. I am truly excited to get started, although we must now understand that things will be more difficult. Today our economic position has changed, unfortunately, due to
1585 the pandemic, and we will need to be more creative and more resourceful while aiming as high and as far as we can.

Mr Speaker, I will be keeping my contribution to the Budget debate this year short and to the point while trying not to do any injustice to any of the ministerial portfolios that I am now once again responsible for.

1590 During the past two years the Technical Services Department has continued to provide technical support to Government Ministries and Departments on a wide range of construction and traffic related matters, as well as meeting their defined responsibilities of maintaining public infrastructure. During the pandemic the Technical Services Department also provided advice to the GHA on numerous projects and were instrumental in setting up the initial drive-through
1595 testing facility at Rooke in a very short timescale to meet the deadlines required. As a result, the last two years have been very different to previous years and fewer projects have been carried out. This is particularly true for the 2020-21 financial year, where the Department has been prudent in its spending and limited its departmental responsibilities to emergencies or essential maintenance of public assets, including the public highway and the sewerage and drainage
1600 network.

Nevertheless, during the course of the last two financial years the Technical Services Department has been involved in a large number of projects covering a wide range of responsibilities, which have included cliff and slope stabilisation schemes within the Upper Rock and Little Bay, the repair of a number of retaining walls, carrying out highways resurfacing works,
1605 highways maintenance, major relining works of a section of the main sewer and general sewer maintenance and improvement works. In addition, the Department has also provided support on the implementation of several projects related to the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan (STTPP) launched in March 2017.

This coming year will see the continuation of our roads resurfacing programme, albeit on a reduced scale. Our very successful roads resurfacing scheme was commenced by the Department
1610 in an effort to tackle the never-ending need to repair and maintain our roads due to the large number of vehicles, but especially heavy goods vehicles, that frequent our roads. Mr Speaker, you will recall that in May 2019 the Technical Services Department embarked on the largest roads resurfacing scheme ever undertaken and saw many roads being fully resurfaced. This year will see
1615 the continuation of this never-ending task, making the best use of the funding being granted and voted for this year.

The replacement and enhancement of pelican crossing lights and equipment has continued during the past couple of years, working jointly with the Gibraltar Electricity Authority. During this time three more light-controlled crossings, inclusive of countdown timers, have been installed at
1620 Europort Avenue by GASA Swimming Pool, at Waterport Road by the access road leading to Varyl Begg Estate, and finally on Rosia Road adjacent to Jumper's Building. The Government will

continue to review all existing light-controlled crossings and provide further countdown timers in areas where these are not present.

1625 The Department also continues to successfully manage road closures and diversions on the public highway, both for its own in-house works and for all other utility companies and contractors. All road closures are assessed and carried out in a manner that allows essential works to be undertaken whilst allowing vehicles and pedestrians to circulate in a safe manner with the minimum of disruption. The increased construction activity generated by new projects over the past few years makes this task increasingly difficult. In order to reduce the impact as much as possible, road closures continue to be avoided during peak times wherever possible, and after-hours and weekend work is a condition that is normally imposed on contractors in order to minimise inconvenience to the public.

1630 With regard to coastal engineering works, the Department continues to monitor and carry out maintenance and repair works as and when required. The Department also continues to provide advice to developers and the Development and Planning Commission on all aspects of coastal engineering as and when required. During this financial year Technical Services will be reviewing the existing coastal defences at Eastern Beach and Sandy Bay with a view to carrying out essential maintenance works.

1640 With respect to cliff stabilisation and rock fall protection projects during the 2019-21 financial years, the Department has been involved in numerous schemes located within the Upper Rock. This has seen stabilisation works being carried out at the Apes' Den, Windmill Hill and St Michael's Cave. These areas are all located in areas frequented by locals and visitors to Gibraltar alike and it is important that within the limitations of living in a place like Gibraltar, where rock falls are inevitable, these areas are kept as safe as possible.

1645 During the past year the Technical Services Department was also involved with works to a number of retaining walls. These have included works at Blackstrap Cove, Europa Point, Jew's Gate and Witham's Road. During the current year the Department will continue to monitor our retaining walls and effect repairs as necessary.

1650 Moving on to sewers, during the past year the Infrastructure section of the Department has continued to maintain the public sewerage network as part of HM Government's commitment in this area. The major desilting and relining works of the main sewer commenced several years ago and continued with the successful relining of the section of sewer running under Lover's Lane towards the College of Education. These works are considered essential given the age and condition of the sewer in this location and the disruption that can be caused in the event of a failure of the sewerage network. The Department is currently undertaking camera surveys of the main sewer in order to prioritise the continuation of this essential maintenance work. Works were also completed at Rosia Bay and at Devil's Gap, where a new drainage system was installed to overcome a historical issue of blockages as a result of the poor condition of the existing network in the area.

1660 The condition and upkeep of Gibraltar's main sewer and storm water drainage networks continues to be a matter of great concern for the Government to what is arguably the most important part of our infrastructure. The Department will therefore this year be continuing its major desilting and cleansing works of the sewer network and will be carrying out upgrade works where necessary. Other works will include gully cleansing, manhole repairs and the general upkeep of the public storm and sewerage networks. Given the sharp rise in developments in Gibraltar, the Department continues to provide advice to both developers and the Development and Planning Commission on the impact that these various developments can have on our existing sewerage network.

1670 Finally, funding is once again being sought for the purchase of equipment to allow the Sewer Infrastructure section to continue to expand and provide an enhanced service in respect of its inspections of the sewer network. This also applies to the Garage and Workshop, where funding for new equipment is also being sought. They will continue to provide a service to maintain the fleet of Government vehicles, including the refuse collection vehicles. As in previous years, the

1675 situation with the Garage and Workshop remains under review and expressions of interest were sought to explore the possibility of the leasing and future maintenance of Government's fleet of vehicles. As yet, no final decision has been made on this option.

1680 I would once again also like to take this opportunity to publicly thank the Infrastructure section and on-call officers of the Technical Services Department for their hard work and commitment during those times in the past year where Gibraltar has suffered from storms and very heavy rain. It is thanks to the very hard work and dedication of this team whilst most of us are at home that the impact of these storms is not greater on both our sewerage and road networks.

1685 The Technical Services Department is one of those Government Departments that is rarely in the limelight but works tirelessly behind the scenes to deliver on its defined responsibilities to maintain public infrastructure and to support and provide technical advice to other Government Ministries and Departments. As can be seen, it will continue to do so this coming year in all manner of projects in order to deliver on the Government's extensive and comprehensive programmes.

I will now report on the progress made during these financial years on initiatives that were already in motion, together with new projects commenced by my colleague Minister Vijay Daryanani whilst Minister responsible for transport.

1690 Parking will always be a problem in Gibraltar unless we can work together to reduce our need for it. There is a very tight balance to achieve with respect to the revenue and employment potential there is within the local car sales market and our need to look at our small town as a place totally overtaken by the car. Even though more parking is created each and every time a new estate is built and in theory those who buy into these new estates will invariably move their cars to the new parking areas within the estate, we still do not see more on-street parking space available. On the contrary, there are more and more cars and vans taking up space further away from people's homes. The reality, it seems, is that we have a problem letting go of our cars. This is something that we will need to tackle eventually; we have no other option.

1700 Nevertheless, during the past 18 months three new pay and display parking zones became operational on Harbour Views Road and Europort Roundabout, providing a total of 37 pay parking bays, operational between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily. These areas include free parking after the stipulated hours except on Harbour Views Road, which will operate on a 24-hour basis daily with peak and off-peak tariffs. This also includes public holidays and weekends. This provides parking turnaround and access to the areas in close proximity. This is the first pay and display that charges users round the clock, 365 days a year.

1710 A further new pay and display parking zone was established at the ex-Queen's Cinema site and became operational on 12th March 2020, providing 21 parking bays active between the hours of 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily, with free parking after 10 p.m. In addition to this, one new disabled parking bay and a motorcycle bay were demarcated within the site. This now provides parking turnaround and access to businesses, places of work and popular tourist hotspots in the nearby area.

1715 Another new pay and display parking zone was established at Coaling Island, becoming operational on 8th June 2020, providing 105 parking bays, operational between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. from Monday to Friday. The area continues to provide parking at no cost after the stipulated hours and during public holidays and weekends. This provides parking turnaround in an area commonly used to park vehicles on a long-term basis, with a minority left unattended and derelict for long periods. This area also provides additional parking opportunities for nearby leisure areas such as the small boats marina, Coaling Island marina, and Commonwealth Park, as well as increasing the overall parking stock to the city centre for visitors and commuters.

1720 Even though hugely unpopular at the beginning, pay and display is one of the only ways to guarantee parking turnaround. It is impossible to have free parking without having cars block these spaces indefinitely. It is by seeking a parking fee that people will use that space for as long as they really need to, leaving that same space available to another user in short time. Parking fees should reflect the needs in a specific area. Quicker turnaround requires higher hourly rates, such as at Line Wall Road, giving more opportunities for people to go shopping for specifics, having

1725

lunch or running errands. Lower hourly rates allow for longer parking for people who need to go to work or spend longer in the area for perhaps recreational purposes. Without well-planned parking fees, parking is impossible and more time needs to be spent driving around looking for space, leading to increased emissions.

1730 Amendments to the parking configuration within Grand Parade was announced on 8th July 2020. As a result, zone 1 parking for permit holders saw an increase to the existing stock from 127 to 211, giving a 60% increase to the current residential parking stock in Grand Parade. These changes formed part of the ongoing consultation process with stakeholders and are constantly monitored and reviewed with the aim of providing more efficient use of the existing parking stock
1735 within the car park. Care must be taken when seeking the views of stakeholders, as usually every action will have an equal and opposite reaction. Finding the right balance is the hardest challenge.

All parking facilities throughout Gibraltar will continue to be constantly reviewed to ensure that the limited space available is put to the best use.

1740 A new Transport Advisory Committee was set up, providing advice on traffic and transport related matters to the Government. This Committee seeks to provide the views of stakeholders, the public and representatives bodies in traffic and transport locally.

Following advice and in consultation with the Gibraltar Bus Company, a new school bus service was introduced and became operational as from 6th January 2020. The school bus departs from Elliot's Battery bus stop at 8.20 a.m. during school term. It is hoped that this may encourage fewer
1745 car trips, with this dedicated bus service exclusively for school children. Bus Route 7 – Mount Alvernia – also sees an extended service time until 8 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Following the success of the first phase of the old street signs project – which was brought to life with the idea of preserving our spoken heritage, that of our old street names, which was slowly being lost – phase 2, which had already seen the groundwork done, was launched in February
1750 2020. Five new plaques were unveiled, containing a short description of the origin of the colloquial name so that we never forget our past. The new plaques included those at Library Ramp, New Passage, Boschetti's Steps, Town Range and Crutchett's Ramp.

The installation of a new sliding security bollard system at Casemates Gates was completed on 20th November 2020. This innovative surface-mounted bollard system consists of two fixed
1755 bollards on a plate with a single central sliding bollard to provide access into Casemates. The low-profile configuration of this system allows the installation of these bollards in areas where deep excavations are not feasible due to existing infrastructure in the ground. The configuration also allows constant pedestrian access even whilst closed. This new hostile vehicle mitigation device at Casemates Gates is the first of its kind in Gibraltar and its performance will be monitored before
1760 more locations are rolled out to safely and effectively secure the town centre from unauthorised vehicles. The road space between the fixed bollards also acts as a speed calming measure, meaning when the sliding bollard is open vehicles would need to reduce their speed to transit through.

It came as a personal disappointment to see that the Main Street and Irish Town Cycle Scheme was suspended. The intention of such a scheme was to allow cyclists to use this area after the
1765 busy hours, so as not to need to cycle on roads during the late evening or night when roads generally become less safe for a number of reasons. The reasons for the discontinuation of this scheme will be looked at carefully in the context of the larger plan for encouraging cycling as an alternative means of transport to the private car. The greatest concern highlighted at the time of
1770 suspension was the lack of policing in the area where cyclists and e-scooters were found using this area during the restricted hours, therefore creating a risk to pedestrians. It should not mean that because of a few disrespectful users all other law-abiding user groups, especially families and children, should need to stay without. It was stated that this scheme saw low uptake, which is in fact what was expected in a place where commuting cycling is not commonplace. Most cyclists
1775 anyway would use other roads, as they are quicker and more direct. The intention of this area in town was to create a quiet area to encourage families to try to cycle, young children to be able to enjoy their bicycles in safety and people to be able to ride to work in the morning or home late

evenings. Nevertheless, the concept of a cycle lane through town was due to be reviewed, as most other cities adopt shared spaces as opposed to separate painted lanes.

1780 The use of cargo bikes as a form of last-mile sustainable delivery in town will be explored further, as it makes huge sense that, if possible, and with the right encouragement, a cargo bicycle is greener, less bulky and dangerous than a van spewing out fumes in the centre of town.

1785 New bicycle racks were rolled out at 10 locations throughout Gibraltar, providing an increase of 70 cycle spaces, complementing the existing bicycle parking facilities at key locations within the city centre and other leisure areas. Cycling infrastructure by way of safe, secure bicycle parking is critical to help take-up of cycling in cities and is a great investment.

1790 During lockdown Gibraltar saw a vast improvement in our air quality, as my colleague the Minister for the Environment will vouch for. The pandemic saw cities throughout the world transform their streets and improve the public realm. An increase in cycle shared schemes was witnessed and many people took up the shared bicycle or used their own personal bicycle to get to work instead of sharing a car or public transport. It made total sense. The bicycle, for certain distances, became the perfect socially distant mode of safe travel and transport. Many cities used pop-up cycle lane infrastructure to try to harness this marked social change and help protect cyclists, one that was driven by the different populations themselves. Bicycles rapidly sold out and
1795 for the first time, just when bicycle-part manufacturers thought that the pandemic would see the end of their businesses, a miracle happened: bicycle spare parts that had been gathering dust in the warehouses of giant cycling-part companies started to move. One order led to another as bicycle manufacturers started to respond to the worldwide astronomical demand for bicycles, and they started building bicycles in quantities never seen before. Within months even the spare parts
1800 had been exhausted, and even now there are still shortages of bicycles and shops are still struggling to get their hands on bicycles, especially the most popular brands. Purchasers are now still almost unable to specify colours or accessories at the point of purchase as shops grapple for what is being supplied to them.

1805 The pandemic saw much negativity and much tragedy but there was also a lot of opportunity to harness. Many leading environmental experts described this time as an opportunity of a lifetime. The world does not often get these chances, these pauses to life, and it was one to grasp with five fists. All of a sudden, as Gibraltar locked itself down, Mount Sidi Musa in Morocco appeared crystal clear on the horizon, coming out of the perpetual dust that lay before it. I peered at it from my offices at St Bernard's Hospital. The horizon was so clear that the Atlas Mountains
1810 behind Sidi Musa could also be seen too. There was that clear sense of clean air and I think we all felt it. Our air monitoring equipment verified this observation. Yet we have lived and today re-live this day by day – lorries, trucks, HGVs, diesel and petrol cars driving under 1,000 m to take children to school, to go to work, to drive round and round in circles to find parking, sitting in traffic queues along Queensway, Rosia Road and Main Street. We sit locked inside our cars, windows closed,
1815 breathing through particulate filters and the air conditioning in an encapsulated environment. We have lost and are losing that contact with nature, that need to get the blood pumping, to feel better, fitter, healthier. We now no longer hunt and gather at the supermarket; today it is so much easier to get shopping orders delivered.

1820 At the time of the pandemic, grasping at the only legally permitted opportunity of leaving our homes to seek that critical respite from the shackles of our four walls, Gibraltar came out in droves to walk, power walk, cycle and jog. Never have our streets been so vibrant with people exercising as during the lockdown – and in the perfect silence of empty streets. Never have we eroded the soles of our shoes sooner than the fabric that holds them together. The chirping of the birds became audible as the level of noise pollution dropped. Government at the time also saw that
1825 opportunity and tried doing what other cities were doing. The closure of Europort Avenue, Chatham Counterguard and part closure of Line Wall Road was announced, coming into force on 1st June 2020. The intention was to return public space to the people because, regardless of whether we drive, cycle or catch the bus, the moment we park our cars and walk home or walk from Mum or Dad's car to the school gate or from our parked car to work, we are all pedestrians.

1830 There was a lot of good in the intention behind the closures of these roads. Chatham and
Europort were quite inconsequential to traffic flow, but the Line Wall Road closure came under
fierce attack. This is the normal reaction to change, especially when it affects our beloved cars.
The closure of Line Wall Road provided an opportunity to gather data and see at face value what
1835 effect it would bring about to local traffic. However, I think that one valuable lesson was learned
at that time by the team that spearheaded that initiative: change has to happen slowly. Gibraltar
is not a city with many arteries and there were perhaps many better, smaller environmental
battles to be had rather than have that one all-out war against the car. But brave it certainly was.
The plans were impressive and few would disagree that everyone would have loved to have seen
1840 those plans materialise, but not at the expense of our cars and our freedom to drive them where
we please. We were not ready for it at the time, just like we were not ready for the closure of
Main Street to traffic when that happened in its day. Our dependence on our cars is something
we will need to come to terms with eventually, but once again, alas, we may have to leave that
one for our children to sort out. Brave leaders get lambasted but those who are not brave will
never break boundaries and create a better place for us all to live.

1845 On 6th November, Line Wall Road resumed to normal traffic in both directions, lockdown was
slowly released, the cars returned, Mount Sidi Musa slowly retreated back into the haze, the birds
stop chirping, it seemed, our air became thicker and any potential positive environmental gain
was lost. It was midnight and the carriage became a pumpkin. And here we are, the new normal,
or the same old normal. There are more cars today than during the lockdown. There will be even
1850 more cars tomorrow, electric cars predominantly someday perhaps but more batteries and
lithium and plastic and rubber to dispose of and contend with – but we will still have our cars.

We have an impossible task ahead of us, despite the reality of a horror story, as described by
my friend and colleague John Cortes, that will see within the lives of our grandchildren the rise of
water levels, that will see our lowlands covered by seawater – Laguna, the Reclamation, Glacis,
1855 the Airport. Is this not enough to realise that we must react? We cannot keep burying our head in
the sand. Or can we? Well, if we do not care as a population, then we can simply let our
grandchildren find a solution. Those of us who care must work hard to convince those who do not
care. As already stated by John Cortes, traffic is the biggest contributor to poor air quality and it
is for this reason that Government needs to lead us to a safer, healthier and sustainable future. I
1860 cannot stress this much more. Should we work together and embrace change, or should those
who cannot see past their steering wheels dictate that we head in the direction of climate crisis?
Electrification will no doubt help somewhat, but it is not the way forward. We need to seriously
consider changing the way we live our lives. But it is your choice, our choice; it is up to all of us.

1865 Nevertheless, things will need to move on a little slower now, not least because we are not the
beneficiaries of a large budget but because change needs to be looked at within a certain pace.
The community needs to be offered options, ones that will not stop them exercising their right to
choose, but we all need to recognise and be reminded that what we sow we will reap. If we want
to be healthier, fitter, live longer, be happier and we want this for our children too, we need to
start to look within ourselves and support Government-led initiatives. We need to stop and wait
1870 for a while when projects and initiatives are unveiled and not jump to criticise without giving them
time. No Government wants to punish its people. No Government does things to lose votes and
lose elections. It is easy to do nothing. Few people will overly react if things are kept the way they
are. Some NGOs may seek more, some environmentally conscious citizens may also wish for more,
but popularity is generally not lost. That is the easy way out.

1875 Change is good for us all, and over the next months until the next election I will try to make
inroads into a better, greener Gibraltar. I will be looking at all the projects that are available to us
and try to choose the best ones that will make our environment better within our financial
constraints. I will seek the support of the population, of my Government and parliamentary
colleagues to start making some changes that will hopefully see us become a better place, an
1880 attractive home, an attractive destination for visitors.

Mr Speaker, I will now turn my attention to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department. This Department is the place that churns out that endless supply of car drivers, motorbike riders, the place where all new cars start their life on our roads, the place where new cars become second-hand cars, then third-hand cars, and the place that checks these cars are in good working order. The latter is environmentally the most important function of this Department, as it is here that emissions are checked and vehicle roadworthiness approved.

The DVLD has seen a massive increase in workload recently. Apart from the challenges of the pandemic, this Department has had to pull out all stops, due to Brexit, and has been working very closely with the Government Law Offices and DVLA UK ensuring that we will be able to continue to drive throughout Europe as we transition out of the EU. The staff have managed to step up to the mark and have managed to meet all targets set upon them.

I am proud to say that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Department continues to embrace and use information and communication technology as a tool to achieve a better and more efficient service to the customer. In fact, this Department was one of the first, if not the first to add online Government services some years back. The public is now able to access a total of 13 online DVLD services and applications via the new e-Government portal. These include applications for compulsory basic training, International Driving Permits, driving licences and learners' licences. It is also possible to book driving tests, driving theory tests, roadworthiness or MOT tests online, buy a personalised registration number, change an address, change vehicle ownership, arrange for the disposal of a motor vehicle, request a duplicate logbook or roadworthiness certificate and register a new or imported used motor vehicle. Furthermore, new e-services will be introduced shortly, making the DVLD one of the Government Departments with the most services available online. The DVLD is working on a service to allow individuals to purchase personalised number plates online. This service will allow people to access and pay for their chosen number plate at any time and from the comfort of their own home. The service will cater for the increased demand in personalised number plates, which generates additional revenue to Government.

The DVLD is a very busy customer-facing Department and it has had very high demand from the community, which is to be expected in a population with a penchant for cars and one of the largest vehicle ownership rates per capita in the world. The DVLD staff claim that they can safely say it has been the busiest period in recent history for the Department, especially with the need to allow for the application of international driving licences in preparation for Brexit. The increased demand for driving licences and International Driving Permits, together with the backlog of MOTs due to the suspension of services during lockdown, has been an immense challenge, one that is very difficult to appreciate from the outside. Government had to redeploy extra staff to the Department, with an average of 100 applications being received daily both online and via the counters, and over 60 MOTs have been carried out daily by our hardworking qualified testers.

Due to the nature of the Department, the Driving Vehicle and Licencing Department found itself operating a temporary counter at the Royal Gibraltar Post Office in Main Street in order to serve members of the public who required personal assistance during the lockdown. Printed application forms were made available at this point and personal assistance provided. Furthermore, in order to guarantee prompt delivery of important documents, items like driving licences, log books, International Driving Permits, MOT extensions and blue badges were sent by registered post at no additional cost. The staff at the Driving, Vehicle and Licensing Department worked hard to manage the increase in workload whilst making sure that the necessary safety measures for all involved were in place at all times.

I am very pleased to report that counters will soon be opened at the Eastern Beach MOT Test Centre. A total of four counters plus an additional collection point for business and express service will be made available at this location. Recently, a further counter for the purposes of the DVLD was opened at the one-stop shop in Main Street, opposite the John Mackintosh Hall.

The introduction of the motorcycle compulsory basic training course for riders by the GSLP Liberal Government is a success story, especially for our 17-year-olds, who are now more confident and feel safer before driving on the road. It continues to be delivered by qualified driving

1935 and vehicle examiners with the course structure covering a mix of verbal instruction and practical training that has proven to be a tremendous success. Feedback from the public at large continues to be extremely positive, especially from concerned parents, who feel that the basic course helps their children have a better understanding of road safety.

1940 The MOT Vehicle Testing Centre boasts of the latest equipment to test vehicle emissions. The equipment fully complies with the very latest EU testing legislation and is in line with the manifesto commitment for a green Gibraltar. The vehicle testers are able to find out if any part of the emissions system has been tampered with or removed. As part of this new test, vehicle testers are now able to retrieve generic and manufacturer-specific diagnosis trouble codes. With a view to improving our carbon footprint, stricter emissions checks are underway. The new rules were first introduced in 2018 and apply to diesel vehicles which are fitted with diesel particulate filters. When examined, all vehicles that produce smoke of any colour will immediately fail the test and will need to be corrected before being driven again.

1945 The ADR is a European agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road. The carriage of dangerous goods by road carries the inherent risk of accidents. Considering the safety requirements of vehicles in Gibraltar that carry dangerous goods, and in accordance with the Transport (Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road) Regulations 2010, Government has trained officers to conduct ADR testing at the DVLD. Government will continue to provide this training to new testers in order to qualify officers and allow them to issue an authorisation certificate to these types of vehicles. Additional courses will be held by qualified persons from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) in the UK in order to update all the relevant qualifications as necessary. These courses will be held locally and all qualifications achieved by our testers and examiners are in line with our counterparts from DVSA UK.

1950 Mr Speaker, our transport inspectors ensure that our public transport service continues to improve. Our transport inspectors now ensure that all users and undertakings fully abide by and conform to all the legal requirements under the Transport Act. Furthermore, and due to security access management of pedestrianised areas such as Main Street, a new scheme for permit holders was introduced a few years back and is working very well. A total of seven transport inspectors are deployed throughout Gibraltar and worked extremely hard throughout COVID making sure our public service users wore masks when inside their vehicles and that all COVID measures were being respected inside our public service vehicles. As we continue to welcome tourists and flights back to Gibraltar, their role will be even more demanding.

1965 Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the entire DVLD team for their hard work, and a special mention to Mr Pepe Moreno, our chief examiner, who retired this year after completing full service at the age of 65.

1970 Mr Speaker, I am looking forward to getting back into a Ministry which is both a challenging and rewarding one. When it comes to traffic and transport, beneath every single initiative there is one core value and aim, and that is our environment. This is not about targeting any group or sector within the community. At the end of the day, most of us own cars and motorbikes and most of us like to drive. Many of us also like to cycle, but many of those who would consider riding a bike are very concerned and even scared of riding on our heavily transited roads. But one thing that almost all of us have in common is that we are all pedestrians each and every day. That is the one fundamental thing that needs to be respected and why pedestrians should be at the top of everybody's list.

1980 Walking infrastructure is generally good in Gibraltar, although research and best practice is always evolving and what was acceptable yesterday will find a better way tomorrow. Yet, when there are accidents they also often involve pedestrians. Each and every time a pedestrian crosses a road there is risk, and at that point of conflict speed is what either keeps us safe or is the very reason why injuries could be more serious, even life threatening. The World Resources Institute, Cities Safer by Design (2015) Report showed that at 30 km per hour there is a 10% likelihood of a pedestrian or cyclist fatality, at 40 km per hour there is a 30% likelihood of pedestrian or cyclist fatality and at 50 km per hour – our maximum speed limit in Gibraltar – an astounding 85%

1985 likelihood of pedestrian or cyclist fatality. Is this not evidence enough to want to seriously at least
consider reducing the speed of traffic in Gibraltar? What is the counterargument – I get to work
quicker by driving at a faster speed? Take this on board: research carried out in Grenoble, in
1990 France, showed that the difference in time taken to drive one kilometre between intersections
was 18 seconds when comparing a maximum speed limit of 30 km per hour and 50 km per hour.
Or is the counterargument it will create more traffic because we seldom drive above 20 km per
hour when we are stuck in traffic anyway? Traffic is created by sheer volume of cars and not the
speed they are travelling at. That it perhaps cannot be policed is another matter but not one that
should stop us considering what is safe and beneficial for the environment.

The whole reason behind the STTPP is to find ways of encouraging alternative and more
1995 sustainable modes of transport. It is not about wishing to limit freedoms or a wish to displease.
This is what a climate emergency is all about. It is about action, not about sitting back and seeing
what happens or waiting for a greater law to be imposed from elsewhere. In fact, as I have said
before and made abundantly clear, the STTPP is an environmental document with plans on how
to achieve a greener city.

2000 We declared a climate emergency, most of the world did, but we need to take an important
decision: do we do something about it as a people together, or do we wait for it to be imposed on
us and then complain about it? Do we say that this is for bigger nations and organisations to sort
out, or do we tackle it ourselves, each and every one of us? We cannot just look at the oceans and
say, 'Poor cetaceans, dying due to ingested plastics,' or look at air quality readings and state that
2005 this is the fault of multinationals outside of our immediate vicinity. After all, it was the children
who marched up Main Street to No. 6 to demand that the Government declare a climate
emergency.

Each and every one of us needs to do their bit if we are to leave a meaningful legacy to our
children. We cannot turn a blind eye, and there are so many things that we can all do, which are
2010 not just good for the planet but which are good for us all, for our direct health. We can choose not
to buy plastics, we can choose to recycle, we can choose to drop our used chewing gum in the bin
and not stub out a cigarette butt on the street. Each and every one of us can also look at how we
move and decide if we really need to use a car to drive 500 m to take our children to school or
ourselves to work and remain stuck in a traffic jam, taking us 30 minutes to arrive at our
2015 destination. In a place like Gibraltar, which is in effect a town, a car trip can be more laborious and
less time efficient than walking, catching a bus or cycling.

When it comes to cycling, Gibraltar has very little in the way of infrastructure, other than one
cycle lane across the runway and some bicycle parking. That is about it. Many comment that they
would seriously consider cycling if there was infrastructure but are scared to, yet few would be
2020 scared of driving or riding a motorbike or walking, so it seems that the mode of transport that is
most in need of change and assistance is the bicycle. This is the very thing that cities throughout
the world are encouraging greater use of. There are cities built around the bicycle, yet they did
not start off as cycling cities, they became cycling cities. They became so because their citizens
were fed up and tired of being stuck in traffic, scared of the number of accidents, including lethal
2025 accidents, and wanted that change: people pressure. People, especially worried mothers, started
to drive cars and traffic off the streets of Amsterdam in the late 1960s and are still continuing their
drive to remove parking spaces and cars transiting through the city centre. We want a green
Gibraltar, we voted for a green Gibraltar, but many of us do not want the inconvenience of a green
Gibraltar. That is the reality. It is such a shame. Our small size could make us one of the most
2030 attractive small cities in the world; our health would improve, indeed our life expectancy too.

It is often lonely sitting in my chair, but more people are more supportive as time goes on.
More people are visibly walking, catching the bus and even cycling, compared to when we won
the election in 2019. Mind-set is slowly changing, and if not, awareness is most definitely on the
rise. I recently tweeted that when it comes to initiatives that affect our roads 'it almost feels like
2035 dragging a child to the dentist when they know they are going to get a tooth extracted and it's

going to hurt.’ Nevertheless, I feel that it is my duty to keep to the manifesto that was voted at the last election and, budget permitting, try my best to sow the seeds for a green future.

2040 Had I been the Minister for Transport at the time of the horse and carriage, I would have most probably been spearheading the entry of the car, the bus and the lorry that would bring Gibraltar into the modern era, as I would have thought that it was the best thing to do at the time, a time when the environment was not a consideration at all. Even smoking was considered healthy in those days. Clearly, today we know much more and it is the duty of everyone sitting here today and listening to this debate today to come together when it comes to this matter, which is one of the most important challenges and threats that we face today.

2045 In conclusion, I would like to thank all those working within my respective Departments – most of whom I got to know well while I was responsible for Traffic, Transport and Technical Services – for their hard work. I look forward to working closely with them all once again over the coming months. I would like to thank all technical and administrative staff at Technical Services, the Sewers section, Highways Division, the garage staff, the Bus Company and its drivers and mechanical staff, also the DVLD, the acting chief examiner and all of his staff. Finally, I would like to thank David at the Ministry for all his help in the past year, and Jared, who recently joined him to assist us. I also wish to thank all parliamentary staff for their hard work and assistance throughout the year.

2055 Finally, I wish the Clerk of the Parliament the very best on his retirement. He is someone I have always associated with the Civil Service and a familiar face when I used to visit my Dad at work, then the Registrar of the Supreme Court in the late 1970s.’

2060 **Hon. E J Phillips:** Mr Speaker, insofar as housekeeping is concerned, I thank the Hon. the Chief Minister for the advance copy of Minister Balban’s speech. Of course we wish him well, and hopefully he will return to his Ministry as soon as possible. We welcome him as the former, former, now reinstated Minister for Transport, and surely he will do a better job than his predecessor – we hope. (A Member: Hear, hear.)

2065 It is an honour to contribute to the Second Reading of the Appropriation Bill in relation to areas within my shadow responsibility. Before I commence my main contribution to the debate, I think it is right that we take some time to reflect on the human impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in that regard I associate myself with the comments of the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the House and of course the Minister for Health. We have lost 94 of our people to this horrible virus and we hope that our successful vaccination programme, together with a cautious but realistic approach to the way in which we interact with one another, will avoid large numbers of hospitalisations, further death and grief. Alas, it appears that the numbers are increasing, and, with that, further hospitalisations. Our thoughts, therefore, must be with those in hospital, their families and our health warriors who are on the front line in treating those who have succumbed to the virus. (*Banging on desks*) Each one of those 94 souls we have lost has contributed in one way or another to what makes our community special, and it is my hope that at the appropriate time we are able mark this moment in our history and remember those of our number who have been lost to the disease. Each one of those lives lost is a tragic story of loss, and this House grieves alongside the families. Tragic as the loss of life has been to this cruel disease, we must collectively condition ourselves, as has been stated by many Members of this House and particularly the Leader of the Opposition, to living with COVID. The disease is amongst us and it is here to stay.

2080 As I shadow Health it is right that we also recall all of those frontline workers who have battled against COVID, from our domestic cleaning staff, our healthcare warriors, Elderly Residential Services, the Care Agency and the deployed public servants. The list of those making a contribution in the private and public sector is probably endless, therefore it is right to remark on the collective effort of all of our citizens in the fight against COVID. I know that before this House breaks for the summer we will debate bestowing Gibraltar’s highest honour on the GHA, which will recognise in perpetuity the work done by the many healthcare and ancillary workers in the fight against COVID. It is also right that we publicly thank the British government, the Ministry of Defence and our

winged heroes, the Royal Air Force, who have delivered the vaccines at pace in order for the GHA to get as many vaccines as possible into the arms of our people and our cross-border work force.

2090 It has been remarked by the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Minister that the onset of COVID in our community allowed us on different sides of the House to put aside our differences and disagreements so as to work together in the national interest. It was an important moment for the people of our community to see both the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition share a platform at a press conference to provide reassurance to the community that when the chips were down we purposely put aside our differences with the sole objective of saving lives and protecting the GHA. From my perspective it is right that both leaders of our community be applauded for their focus and determination in that regard.

2100 Now that we appear to be past – hopefully – the worst effects of the virus and our hospital numbers appear, at the moment, to be within fairly controllable limits, the cut and thrust of political debate has returned, and whilst the Opposition will always work together with the Government when the national interest dictates, the people require strong and robust opposition, and most importantly when it comes to the spending of the people’s money.

2105 COVID-19 has been an eye opener to the way in which our community is governed, to the way in which our Parliament functions, to the third world traffic and transport policy, of this government to the crisis within the GHA, the failed strategy on mental health provision and the abysmal handling by this Government of the environment and its false commitment to a greener and child-friendly city, which I will come to in due course.

2110 This is the first time that Members on this side of the House will have the opportunity to attempt to scrutinise – and I use the word ‘attempt’, Mr Speaker – the finances of our community and hold the Government to account in relation to their management of our affairs over the last two years, given the inability to hold a normal Budget session.

2115 This debate is often described as the state of the nation address and inevitably it becomes a politically charged event because of the long-held positions of the main political parties represented in this House. My hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my hon. Friend Mr Clinton have very ably and properly repeated our longstanding position in their reflections of the numbers contained in the Book and I support everything they have stated in their respective contributions. That said, whilst it is no doubt important to reflect on the global events that have affected economies around the world, we must resist the temptation, when debating the Budget, of placing the blame for all our domestic woes at COVID-19’s door.

2120 COVID has, of course, been an enormous challenge to our way of life. It has taken lives, it has severely curtailed our civil liberties and it has forced us all to reflect on what is important to all of us. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen our people come together to fight the disease, but it has also exposed deep cracks and fault lines in how our healthcare system is managed and delivered. The responsibility for those cracks and fault lines rests with the Government and the Government alone. Our job on this side of the House is to ensure that these fault lines are exposed in an open and transparent way, so that we can have an honest and genuine conversation as to how we can improve the delivery of care services to our community by putting efficiency and the value of money front centre. The GHA, as a treasured institution, must be protected, preserved and allowed to manage itself devoid of ministerial interference in the minutiae of the day-to-day running of a Health Service.

2130 I note that the hon. Lady in her address talked about inefficiencies within the GHA and repeated a mantra that was repeated by her predecessor in the last Parliament insofar as what they were doing at the time in relation to weeding out inefficiency. The expectation of the GHA by the public is extremely high, as is the cost of delivering the service to our community. It is likely that we will continue to require services of a tertiary nature based in Spain and the United Kingdom in order to plug the services gap that we have. It is clear to me that, COVID or no COVID, the costs of providing the level of healthcare that meets the expectations of our community are eye watering on any analysis and we must ensure that we can obtain the best possible value for money whilst preserving and improving the quality of care received by our citizens.

2140 The Leader of the Opposition spoke yesterday about controls and value for money, and after hearing the contribution by the Chief Minister yesterday it is clear to me by the absence of those words in his 1,000-paragraph speech that war on wastage and weeding out inefficiencies in the GHA has long been abandoned by the party in government.

2145 During the Chief Minister's acceptance speech on the morning of the General Election in 2019 he proclaimed, as has been heard in this House over the last two days, an end of the age of entitlement and the birth of the age of responsibility. One could be forgiven for thinking that the Chief Minister was reading from the book of the GSD, but it is clear to all that he must have tacitly accepted the fact that his giveaway elections and his spending like there was no tomorrow was a gross mistake on his part.

2150 We placed down a marker and warning to the Chief Minister that his addiction to debt and the spending on vanity projects would come back to bite him, and bite him hard. The learned and Hon. Mr Feetham warned him of the perfect storm, which has been compounded by the COVID-19 crisis. Did he not listen? He spent years and years, and over £750 million, fuelling the age of entitlement, not realising that the hunger for handouts and jobs for the boys and party faithful had got way out of hand. From lavish VVIP parties at the multi-million-pound GMF, to the multi-million-pound rebuilding of 'Picardo's Palace' at No. 6 – inclusive of White House style war bunker – to election giveaways, the Chief Minister now needs to rely on the generosity of foundations and charities to pay for the refurbishment of this very House, the centre and the home of our democracy, and of banks to pay for the inefficient spending of £3.88 million on a small triangular park at Midtown.

2160 And what of the rest, Mr Speaker? Well, the good old hardworking Gibraltarian public, the silent majority, will now need to pay for his decade of overspend and the creation of a mountain of debt to rival the dizzy heights of 'Picardo's Peak', the rubble mountain at Easter Beach. With the skills of a second-hand care salesman he spins it by talking about a small contraction in GDP, and Gibraltar's GDP per capita is the highest on the planet according to the IMF. It is no message that the members of our community will now need to dip into their pockets to pay for it all.

2165 Whilst I know that the Chief Minister will never admit to his mistakes, save for his apology over Line Wall Road, his acceptance of the age of responsibility after his 10 years' spending splurge and his adoption of GSD policy is now welcome. We all know what his retort will no doubt be: the Theatre Royal and the Airport. He will point the finger at the GSD's time in office. He will also ask us to select which projects we would have done and those that they should not have done, which ones we would not have built if we were in office at the time. This is not a debate about that, it is about a debate in which the debt of our community has been structured and the £1.7 billion gross debt that has been spoken about by my hon. Friend Mr Clinton, which our children and our children's children will need to pay back – a generation of debt – and now our population will have to pay increases in Social Security and electricity charges.

2175 We have always been the party which has been financially prudent and responsible with taxpayers' money and a party that prioritises the spending of the public money. The Members of the party opposite have always preferred to spend, spend, spend, and we continue to see the results of the reckless spending which has dominated their 10 years in office. This is what sets us apart from the GSLP Liberal alliance. Much can be said of the former GSD administration, some of which I did not agree with, but what it had at its core was financial independence, prudence and stability, which the Chief Minister and his cheerleaders have chipped away at for years, and this is ultimately why we vote against the Budget each year and we will do again this year.

2185 Mr Speaker, in relation to my shadow responsibilities for the Gibraltar Health Authority, the Health Authority is by a country mile the largest area of Government spending, and when you throw in our response to COVID, the cost of the GHA is astronomical. The cost of running the GHA over the last two years nearly reached £300 million. This year the cost has been estimated at £131 million. Whilst these are very big numbers on any analysis, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that even before COVID hit the Government was acutely aware of the financial crisis within the GHA and this has been magnified in the context of the public health emergency. The

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Minister today, in her contribution to the debate, talked about inefficiencies and efficiency within the GHA and of course that is an entire rewind and replay of what the former Member Mr Costa did back in 2018, which I will now proceed to demonstrate.

2195 As a reference point, back in 2017 the former Minister effectively declared a war on waste within the GHA. The Government announced a number of measures to 'tighten financial controls'. The former Minister for Health's stated mantra was 'increased patient care at better value for money'. The Government at the time procured the services of PWC UK, no less, to assist in developing robust financial governance and the Government committed to delivering better control and financial balance. We were told that the Government was to make changes to procurement processes with great oversight in respect of staggering – and those are their words, not ours – sponsored patient costs. The Government clearly wanted to tighten controls, have better governance and financial balance. The questions to the current Minister for Health in her
2200 report, where have you tightened those controls and how have you developed tougher and more robust financial governance?
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Back in 2017 the Government referred to the year-on-year increases to the sponsored patient scheme as staggering and stated that it had increased a staggering 400% since the GSLP Liberals had arrived at No.6. In the year when that statement was made, namely 2017-18, the actual figure
2210 for sponsored patients was £12.7 million, the figure in 2018-19 was £11.4 million and for the last two years the outturn is £33.6 million, or £16.5 million per year. The estimate for 2021-22 appears to be £13.5 million. It is clear that the former Minister was attempting to take back control and ensure that the public was receiving better value for money. However, on a simple analysis of the figures it is clear that the repatriation policy, the drive to improve efficiencies and the war on
2215 wastage have been lost. In relation to some of the headline figures, prescriptions – spoken about by the hon. Lady in her contribution – drugs and pharmaceuticals were at a staggering spending level of £21.5 million, £36 million for 2019 and 2021 alone. Our recruitment costs within the GHA for 2019-2020 amount to just shy of £3 million, which shows a very high turnover of staff within the service. The amount paid out by the GHA in compensation and legal costs for litigation against
2220 the GHA for 2019-21 was a staggering £2.4 million. These are just a few examples of the costs of the GHA to the public, and whilst it is rightly one of treasured institutions it would appear that the Government has long abandoned its policy and war of wastage and inefficiencies within the GHA. They have lost budgetary control of the GHA and it is in crisis.

Yesterday we heard from the Minister for Public Health in relation to getting down the
2225 collective weight of our homeland given the worrying incidence of disease related to poor nutrition and lack of exercise. I agree with him as a matter of principle, but whilst Public Health has been focused on COVID-19 this is not some novel public health message. The way in which you drive down the cost of healthcare is by positively encouraging active lives, discouraging poor nutrition and increasing health and well-being amongst our children. The Government's lack of
2230 commitment is clear by the fact that the last GHA Health and Lifestyle Report was 2014-15, some six years ago. Whilst the Chief Minister was fuelling the appetite for entitlement there has been a distinct and worrying lack of support for improving the health of our national by the Health and Public Health Ministries.

Putting aside the question of the astronomical cost of healthcare to our community, when
2235 reviewing the Book it filled me with a deep sense of disappointment not to find a single mention in the Book of the fabled mental health budget. As you will recall, when Public Health England prepared its highly critical report on the provision of mental health services in Gibraltar it was absolutely scathing of the Government for failing to provide a specific head for mental health. Mr Speaker, you will recall that this was a report that sat idle on the desk of the Minister for two
2240 years before they saw fit to publish it. I suspect the same will be true of the PWC UK audit report of the GHA. The failure to provide for a mental health budget in this Book is to perpetuate the stigma of mental health and reinforce the widely held view that the Government is failing our people in the provision of mental health in our community. Put more simply, the conduct of the

2245 Government and the failing to heed the criticisms of the Public Health England report it is to ignore
the cries from families who have lost young men to suicide and is to disrespect the memory of
those who have died because they lost hope and did not have the support from Mental Health
Services that they should have had in a modern, progressive society like ours. The failure to
provide for a definitive mental health budget fails to heed the warnings of the mental health
charities who have, day in, day out, repeated their concerns about mental health provision.
2250 Critically, the Budget fails to address the mental health provision deficit in our community, and
given the focus that was alluded to by the hon. Lady in her contribution on the COVID-related
mental health issues that have arisen in our community, its absence in the Budget Book itself is
completely unforgivable.

The evidence for the lack of support is within the pages of this Book and particularly on
2255 page 214, to which I will now refer, namely the GHA establishment on the last line, that the
Government clearly does not intend replacing the consultant clinical psychologist. So, now we see
the years of abuse and mismanagement – referred to by both the Leader of the Opposition and
Mr Clinton – of our public finances. We cannot even replace a key and critical role within our
Mental Health Services. This is a scandalous discovery which the Government is attempting to
2260 remedy by the provision, at page 216 of the Book, for two supernumerary posts, which fails to
support continuity of care for the most vulnerable in our community. The sheer lack of
understanding or ignorance, at worst, of the scale of the mental health problem amongst the
Government is staggering. Even after receiving one of the most damning reports in our history,
which they sat on for two years before they published it, they do not take into account its most
2265 critical findings, such as provision for a mental health budget.

Moving from one scandal to another – the damning report to namely the disclosure in this
House of the Prof. Burke letter – it is clear, whatever you make of that letter, that there is
something systemically wrong in the management of the GHA, which again was alluded to by the
hon. Lady in her now new committee to deal with strategy, which refers to inefficiencies but also
2270 the management of the GHA. So, they tacitly accept in the hon. Lady's contribution that there are
serious issues concerning the management of the GHA. For a very senior office holder to make
serious allegations against a cabal of individuals within the GHA, alluding to preventable deaths
with the GHA, irrespective of the accuracy – I know the Chief Minister ad nauseam dealt with this
issue in questions at the last session – should provide everyone in this House and everyone outside
2275 this House with a serious degree of concern about how the GHA is operating and the abject failure
of the Government to resolve issues within the GHA.

In summary, whilst we have come together at the worst of times in living history we have also
exposed very serious failings by the Government and leadership at the GHA in putting mental
health strategy front and centre. Whilst COVID has clearly put a strain on the Health Service, we
2280 have had serious concerns about health services and how they are being restored. Whilst the hon.
Lady did discuss how there was a pause to routine and non-clinical and consultation services, there
are still serious concerns among members of our community about the huge delays in relation to
cervical screening, dental appointments for children, the primary care appointment system,
delays and cancellations of operations, an appointment system which has come under serious
2285 strain and still no clarity over MRI services for our community. In summary, the GHA has faced
arguably the biggest challenge in its history with COVID, but there is a crisis in healthcare that goes
beyond COVID and this needs to be remedied. I feel in this House that we sometimes, and
particularly in this debate, scratch the surface of the GHA, but as an item which is the largest single
cost to the taxpayers, the professionals within the service deserve better, patients deserve better
2290 and the public deserve efficiency and value for money and not waste.

Mr Speaker, moving to the environment, green Gibraltar and the child-friendly manifesto
prepared by the GSLP Liberal alliance for the last election, we were treated to a long introduction
as to what Mr Environment does, and whilst he spent most of his time on his theatrical prowess
he paid very little attention to climate change. Anyone listening to the debate yesterday – I think
2295 it was yesterday; I forget, it was so long – must have thought that we have cleanest air in the

world, the cleanest seas on earth and that we are all living in the Amazon Rainforest. (**Hon. K Azopardi:** And the best actor.) And the best actor, Mr Speaker, as the Leader of the Opposition has just said. The spin and theatre around his contribution, although impressive as an act, was too long and failed to convince any rational or objective observer or commentator about his commitment to the environment.

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Yesterday we were treated to a lot of hot air and very little substance or ambition, as the Chief Minister alluded to and stated in his contribution yesterday, where he encouraged the population to have ambition. There was no ambition coming out of the mouth of Mr Environment yesterday. It was a vain and embarrassing reflection suitable only for his memoirs – which I am sure he is drafting – and whilst he may be fond of the birds and the bees there was nothing in his speech that gave any reassurance whatsoever to the people of our community as to real improvements to our environment and in particular the quality of the air we breathe. He spoke about the unprecedented level of legislation at the same time as talking about his frustration and disappointment about his failure to deliver a sewerage plant – which was in his manifesto a decade ago.

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This year we were treated to the revelation that his small triangle outside Midtown had originally cost the taxpayer £3.88 million – or to put it another way, the cost of two consultant clinical psychologists for 14 years or a team of mental health professionals for a decade, and the Book still does not account for it. The Chief Minister now says that Trusted Novus Bank will be paying for the costs and the taxpayer will not be burdened with the cost of moving forward. What an incredible, belated disclosure. So, a bank has to bail out the Government for its inefficient building of a mostly concrete triangle. What bank donates nearly £4 million for a concrete triangle? What does it say about a Government that goes wildly over budget and allows a bank to step in and bail them out? It is a classic example of GSLP Liberal mismanagement of the people's money. The question remains: why shouldn't the developer have paid for the park? Surely a developer who wishes to build luxury flats and top-end commercial property should be required to put something back into our community by way of planning gain. It seems to me that all the Government wants to do is fill the pockets of rich developers who have already had their fill off the backs of working men and women, the taxpayers of our community. (*Interjection by Hon. Chief Minister*) I do not know what the hon. Gentleman just uttered, but I am sure it was not pleasant. If he wants to repeat it in the open, it is fine.

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Hon. Chief Minister: If I translate it, you have no –

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Hon. E J Phillips: I do not need a translation.

Hon. Chief Minister: Do you want to hear about the history of this Parliament?

Hon. E J Phillips: Mr Speaker, Gibraltar has very poor air quality, affecting the health of all in our community. That is evident by the levels of asthma in our community and related lung disease and it is staggering, and nothing is being done about it. Hang on, yes, they did introduce a scheme to encourage new car purchasing. Well, there is an example of hypocrisy. The message to the public was buy a new car and your old one will be taken off the street. They got it wrong, because essentially what happened is that people bought new cars and sold their old cars on to someone else, so in fact increasing the number of cars on our streets. Who thought that one through? No doubt Mr Environment had a role to play in that one.

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Mr Environment opposite, or '*Jardinero*', as he is affectionately known, tries to play to the gallery that he is somehow the only person on the planet to save us from climate change and reduce emissions, but nothing could be further from the truth. He has done nothing in real terms in making improvements to our environment. The dockyard continues to pollute our air and conducts 24-hour working, and 50cc motorcycles continue to plague our streets with noise and fumes with no prospect that the Government will take bold steps towards banning their use.

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Those who litter, dump and pollute our coastline do so indiscriminately with no real penalty or heavy sanction. Concrete towers rise up with dust and noise pollution without the slightest consideration for our quality of life or planning, and there is still, after 10 years, no resolution to pumping raw sewage into our seas. The Hon. Minister for the Environment – Mr Environment – should be ashamed of himself in relation to that. In fact, he accepted in a recent interview on radio – which was, by the way, supposed to be a debate, in which he refused to debate me on the subject ... He described it as a nightmare. When we complained on these benches of the effect of a thousand cigarette butts on Harbour Views Road, ironically deposited in the main by healthcare workers on their break, he passed regulations extending the smoke-free zone to that area. Has he been down there recently? It is effectively an ashtray still and his regulations have been ignored.

The environment must be absolutely central and integral to all Government policy and the Budget, and for the Government to put this fundamental issue at the periphery, given the key role it plays in our quality of life, is a gross dereliction of its duty to future generations of our people. The Government has failed to provide a safer, greener, cleaner and child-friendly city, as they promised, and I will certainly not stand idly and watch the lungs of generations of our people continue to be damaged by very poor air quality, concrete dust, black smoke – another recent example on the ship the other day – and endless fumes from traffic, which he accepted in his speech.

When I speak to young people, one of their main concerns is the environment, and the Government simply pays lip service to the global move to changing the way we live our lives. The Minister for the Environment is quoted as saying – another gem of theatrics:

Our people elected the greenest Government in our history and possibly the greenest Government in Europe.

Whilst Mr Environment continues to allow for raw sewage to be pumped into our seas and encourages 24-hour working at the dockyard, black smoke from ships are indiscriminately releasing noxious fumes into our air, oil spills at sea – the list is endless – the statement that the people have elected the most green government in Europe is the most laughable statement the Minister has ever given.

In 2016 the Minister was quoted as saying he would be ruthless about the environment, but his commitment to the environment is simply a whimper in the background. He is a pussycat defender of the environment. His Government has created a small boats marina with 700 berths without the slightest mention of how he will offset the environmental impact of 700 fuel laden boats pumping pollution into our seas. When he mentioned GibDock yesterday, he did so in passing with no real view as to the environmental impact that this industry has on the health of our community, and our community expects action. The Minister talked about renewables when the only thing that the wave project could power was a kettle. Not one mention of wave energy in his speech – I wonder why – another abandoned supported project. The Minister talked about the quality of water at our beaches being excellent, but has he actually been down to Eastern Beach? Has he seen the metal fragments sticking out of the sand, the concrete dust on our children's feet and building materials strewn around the place? No, he possibly has not because he probably has not been down there. How can he honestly and genuinely come to this House and paint a rosy story of the way we live our lives which is so far removed from reality?

As we are speaking on the Budget our focus when it comes to the environment must be on the important aspect of sustainability and the circular economy. I know that the Father of the House, Sir Joe, discussed at some length the circular economy and he has my support for the proposition of a circulate economy. We need to more. As a modern, progressive country we need to look at the research available and lead on the circular economy. We are in a unique position, as a small community, to do so. Instead, we sit on our hands and let the rich get richer without a thought to how we can do things better in order for all of our citizens to prosper and have a cleaner and sustainable way of life. Quality of life is important to our community, as is the air that we breathe – to use a great Gibraltarian songwriter's line. Our waters and the way we use our land

for development are so very important but the Government seems only interested in selling off land to developers without the slightest thought to our quality of life and how we want to see our community physically shaped over the next 50 years. There is very little imagination, little enthusiasm and certainly no ambition in what the Chief Minister focused on in his contribution yesterday. When it comes to the environment, all there is is profit for developers and a mountain of debt.

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Moving to traffic and transport, another debacle of a Department led by the former Minister, who is with us today, I am glad to see – again I thank the Chief Minister for a copy of that speech – what can I say but to repeat the message of the learned and Hon. Leader of the Opposition in which he made it abundantly clear to the former Minister for Transport that Line Wall Road belongs to the people of Gibraltar and not him? Those words were clearly and unequivocally about the former Minister’s abject failure of Government policy in this area. The Chief Minister was clear is his apology: the Government got Line Wall Road wrong. And it appears clear that the present Minister – I should say the former, former, newly reinstated Minister – is set to repeat the disastrous mistakes of his predecessors. I am referring to his new idea to reduce speed limits within Gibraltar.

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The Government has failed to provide a long-term and sustainable transport system which balances the needs of the community and encourages greater use of alternatives to car and motorbike use. Nothing in the newly appointed former, former Minister for Transport’s speech says anything about the detail in which he will focus on a lot of the lessons that we have learnt from Mr Environment. The focus in his speech on cycling is admirable, but it will not work in the context of a lack of capacity on our roads to accommodate cycle lanes or segregate traffic in a safe and meaningful way. Insofar as the speech is concerned, that has been accepted by the Minister. He clearly takes the view that in relation to roads it is extremely difficult. There is only one road he refers to where this would be possible, and that is the road before the land frontier on the runway. So, he accepts that.

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Our primary focus must be on walking, improving footpaths and finding solutions which allow for pedestrians to cross roads with the least impact on traffic flow possible. We are told by the Government that we have a world-class vaccination and testing programme, and I for one cannot see why, in a small country like ours, we cannot provide our community with a world-class green public transport system that would take people out of their cars and move people around in a far more efficient and environmentally friendly way. People need to have confidence that our public transport will not let them down and it will deliver. We need an increased number of buses, better routes and more technology which encourages our residents to jump on public transport as opposed to continuing to be engaged in jams that pollute the air we breathe. Nothing in Minister Balban’s speech has included any detail as to how he is going to achieve this.

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The Government needs to actively encourage the purchase and use of electric motorcycles and disincentivise the use of fuel bikes. It fails to do either. The Minister’s recent ill-thought-out and ill-researched argument of lowering the speed limits in Gibraltar – which is set out at page 24 of his speech, for those who are following it, Mr Gibraltar ... Mr Speaker – (*Interjection and laughter*)

Hon. Member: He could have been Mr Gibraltar once!

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Hon. E J Phillips: He could have been – Mr Speaker – Mr Gibraltar. Mr Balban could have been as well, I suspect.

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The argument he put forward on lowering speed limits was eminently dismantled by our Commissioner of Police, who simply said to everyone, ‘It won’t work,’ and I agree. Traffic offenders need education first and foremost, and this, with a little bit of imagination – or, again, ambition – on the part of the Government, coupled with a well thought out approach with the Justice Ministry, may well deliver long-term reductions of traffic offending.

The Hon. the Minister for Transport talked about compulsory basic training, set out at page 21 of his statement, but it does not cut it. What we need is a joined-up initiative with the Police and

2450 the Justice Ministry in retraining to avoid clogging up our traffic courts in particular, and there are innovative ways in which the Minister can get engaged in that, but nothing can be found in the Minister's statement on that issue.

2455 The Government needs to do its homework when developing a sustainable traffic and transport policy. The last two, Line Wall Road and the speed reduction policy, have failed miserably and it is clear to all that they have failed to get a grip on the crisis in public transport and traffic management. The Chief Minister talked in his contribution about a world-class sports facility where Olympians can come to Gibraltar to practise their sport, and he talks about a world-class vaccination programme, but we have a third world transport and traffic policy which is a public embarrassment to residents and tourist alike. The Chief Minister talked about unprecedented growth in the economy, but we cannot even move our elderly from the Frontier to the South District on buses.

2460 When I raised the issue of the legal status of e-scooters with the former Minister for Transport he could not even confirm whether they were legal or illegal, clearly a fundamental misunderstanding of the lawfulness of this activity. No wonder he got the chop from the Ministry for Transport, because it was that sheer level of misunderstanding of what the law on e-scooters must have been, coupled with his Line Wall Road debacle that led him to getting axed by the Government. On a serious note, though, in relation e-scooters, (*Interjection*) when you consider the report in many of the UK papers today ... On a very serious note, a three-year-old child outside a park in London was knocked over by an e-scooter and she will now suffer lifelong disabilities as a result of it. For the former Minister to say in this House that he does not know what the law is surrounding e-scooters is shameful, quite frankly, Mr Speaker, and he should know better. Now we wait for the new – former, former, reinstated – Minister to come up with his view in respect of e-scooters, and hopefully, post the consultation process, he will be introducing legislation for all of us to debate particularly the safety of e-scooters in our community.

2475 Mr Speaker, the main plank of the GSLP manifesto was to create a green and child-friendly city, but in relation to traffic, and when you look at pages 181 and 182 of the Book, there is absolutely no provision. Sometimes you have the £1,000 provision but in this case you have zero financial provision for encouraging walking in our community; in relation to the widening of Europa Road South, zero provision; in relation to pedestrian safety on Keightley way tunnel improvement and lighting, zero provision; in relation to bus shelters, where they are trying to encourage you to get on a bus, zero provision in the Book. That completely contradicts everything the Minister for Transport has said in his written speech.

2480 If we are serious, as a community, about changing the way in which we move our people about the city and winning the argument that car use should be abandoned in favour of public transport, we must instil confidence that our transport system plan is robust and serious. We must also carefully plan what we want our city to look like in 50 years. At the moment, buildings are going up without the slightest thought as to how we want our community to look, and with ageing roads, utilities and infrastructure it is only a matter of time before we have to start digging up our roads again – another example of mismanagement when it comes to our public finances, our public utilities and the public service to the members of our community.

2490 Before the former Minister for Transport was removed from his role as transport head, he made a scathing assessment of the Sustainable Traffic, Transport and Parking Plan, and he also said that he did not agree with all of it. The cost of this report is in the Book at page 180, subhead 4(ZQ). This has cost the taxpayer £1 million since 2019 and will cost the taxpayer, according to the Book, another £500,000. What on earth are we paying for, if the former Minister said essentially that he did not agree with all that was in the transport policy? What confidence is there in the Government policy in relation to transport and traffic? There is zero confidence in him, the present Minister for Transport and the Government's policy on traffic.

2500 Mr Speaker, one of the things I found quite amusing from the current Minister for Transport was his tweet reference. He referenced his own tweet when was he was talking about initiatives that affect our roads. He said, 'It almost feels like dragging a child to the dentist when they know

they are going to get a tooth extracted and it's going to hurt.' What he is trying to suggest is that pushing people in the direction of using buses and using more environmentally friendly initiatives is like pulling a tooth, but when you have an incompetent dentist of course it is going to hurt, and that is the point that is made from that: an incompetent dentist with lifelong issues resulting from that extraction.

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Finally, Mr Speaker, in relation to the issue on transport, much was made of the Minister's contribution from his lovely offices, that he used to occupy, of course, and I did note at page 16 of his rather elegant contribution to this House that he spent most of his time – and this is his quote in his speech, for those who will not be able to access it because it will be online ... He talked about reminiscing:

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Mount Sidi Musa slowly retreated back into the haze, the birds stop chirping, it seemed, our air became thicker and any potential positive environmental gain was lost. It was midnight and the carriage became a pumpkin.

Effectively, what the Minister was saying was actually that during COVID there was apparently cleaner air, cleaner roads and in fact he could see Morocco from his lovely and no doubt luxurious offices. But that is not the reality of what we are talking about. What he is referring to is Line Wall Road, of course, and there was an abject failure of the Government in relation to Line Wall Road because they did not plan it properly. There was no massive consultation with the public in relation to that road and that is why thousands of people joined issue with Members of this side in order to object to its closure. There was absolutely no planning by the former Minister, and we hope he does better in focusing on tourism, although I know that my learned and hon. Friend will address those points in his contribution concerning Wizz Air and others.

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In relation to drug misuse, from a health perspective the view of the Commissioner of Police yesterday was that cocaine is rife within our community. That should send a sharp warning to the Government given the health and mental health implications of the misuse of this drug.

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On medicinal cannabis we look forward to considering the Bill when it is published and I know that my hon. Friend next to me, Mr Clinton, will take a particularly keen interest in scrutinising that Bill when it is published.

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On nitrous oxide the Chief Minister and I have exchanged communications on this issue and the Government has, for the benefit of those watching this debate, restricted the importation of products containing nitrous oxide. And for those watching this debate – possibly not, at this late hour – the small silver canisters that members of the public are finding on our streets near balloons ... It is what is called hippy crack or laughing gas, and a number of members of our community are inhaling this gas. What I have said to the Government publicly, in a statement, is that we need to legislate in relation to the misuse of this particularly noxious element. It is important that the Government does so and I would encourage them to review their position in relation to hippy crack, given the serious health implications.

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Mr Speaker, in conclusion I will just make five short points: the green and child-friendly city agenda of this Government has now been abandoned; the war on waste and inefficiency in the GHA has been lost and there continues to be a crisis in the GHA; the Chief Minister has declared war on business and those less who are less fortunate through increases to Social Security and electricity; the traffic and transport policy is a third world policy and the Government has done more U-turns than any Government in history on traffic in our community; and it will not be unnoticed by Members of this House that Action on Poverty has said today that the Budget buries the poor. What a condemnation of the Chief Minister's Budget, that a charity, an organisation dedicated to those less fortunate in our community, has described this Budget in this way. I will quote exactly what they have said, for the benefit of accuracy:

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The pressure group accuses the Chief minister of inhabiting a Never-Never Land of ample ministerial comfort, whilst inflicting a significant price hike for many households on essentials such as electricity. This, it says, demonstrates very little knowledge about the lives of ordinary people.

2545 I know that the Chief Minister wishes to protect his legacy, and whilst we would all congratulate him and the Members opposite on their handling of the COVID crisis and the pandemic, he must be careful because his legacy will be waste, abuse and mismanagement of one of the most important resources of our community, the people's money. This has not been caused by COVID. It is a result of a decade of mismanagement, abuse and waste, Mr Speaker.

2550 Thank you. *(Banging on desks)*

Hon. Chief Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

After that contribution by what I can only describe as a paper hammer, I propose that we now adjourn until tomorrow at 11 o'clock to continue with the contributions by hon. Members.

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Mr Speaker: I now propose the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 22nd July at 11 a.m.

I now put the question, which is that this House do now adjourn to Thursday, 22nd July at 11 a.m. Those in favour? **(Members: Aye.)** Those against? Passed.

2560 This House will now adjourn to Thursday, 22nd July at 11 a.m.

The House adjourned at 8.25 p.m.